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"HOW PLEASANT FOR YOU, SIR REGINALD, TO BE PERSONALLY CONDUCTED ALONG THE CLIFFS," SAID VANESSA, WITH A TOUCH OF SARCAISM.

VANESSA'S VENGEANCE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"ABCADIA."

"AND you have never had a lover in your life?"
"How very odd, Sissie; when you are—well—so very pretty," said little Nellie Ford, the doctor's daughter, of Madden, to her great friend Cecil West.

"Haven't I? Oh, perhaps you don't count Mr. Marstrain!" said Cecil, laughing.

"Mr. Marstrain—old Mr. Vernon's confidential clerk—that dark-faced Italian-looking man who came down here the other day? Good heavens, Sissie! Why you ought to marry a duke—not an office clerk!" was the indignant answer.

The two girls were sitting in Cecil's sitting-room in Madden Vicarage—called by courtesy a boudoir; but, as her brother Jem jestingly

declared it, far more of the 'den' genus than the boudoir.

And, indeed, when he was at home and the little room was redolent of tobacco and littered with carving tools, perhaps the room did assume a slightly untidy air; but then it looked so homelike, and—above all—Jem was such a favourite.

The old house was a perfect specimen of an English country vicarage—with its warm red gables and ivy-embowered walls.

It was surrounded by a large old-fashioned garden, with winding walks and quaintly-cut flower-beds, which led down through a wicket-gate and a green larch coppice to the sea.

Madden was deep in the country, clustered at the foot of a precipitous cliff, and shut in entirely from the world around by the absolute lack of telegraph office or railway.

The village, consisting of a few red-roofed cottages and about a hundred inhabitants, principally fisher-folk, was several miles from the nearest town; and, as no one ever wished to come to Madden, a stranger was a rare sight in the locality, and was generally gaped at by man, woman and child—as if he were a wild beast let loose from some menagerie.

The vicarage lay close to the sea, and a little further up the winding road stood the doctor's house—with its green shutters and brass knocker—but no one was ever ill in Madden. Dr. Ford would have got on badly had it not been that he possessed a nice little private fortune of his own.

The only other folk of any note were the Lascelles, who lived about three miles away—at a place called Madden Castle; but Cecil knew them only very slightly, as they spent most of their time in London, and, when in the country, were not in the habit of cheering their poorer neighbours by the light of their presence.

Cecil had lost her mother many years ago—when she was a baby—and the white cross that marked her grave lay in the green churchyard just outside Mr. West's study window.

That grief—eighteen years ago—had turned the Vicar into an old man before his time. His white hair and bowed figure lent to his gentle, kindly face an air of such extreme old age that the contrast between him and his blooming daughter was so marked as to be almost absurd.

His only other child—Jem, a boy of twenty—had left home a year before to enter a house of

business as a clerk; and great hopes were entertained as regarded the future of the bright, handsome young fellow who was the idol of his home.

"Yes!" continued Cecil, leaning far out of the window into the balmy June air to pick a nodding blush rose that grew just within reach. "To my mind, lovers would be a bore; really, almost a nuisance, you know!"

Up the gravel sweep—invisible under the wild trails of creepers—was marching a young man, who looked up as she spoke, with the twinkle of the keenest amusement in his eyes.

As he looked up to try and catch a glimpse of the speaker, he received a shower of dewdrops and pink rose petals in his face.

"Oh, dear! how annoying," said Cecil's sweet, shrill, young voice. "My lovely rose has dropped to pieces."

"Ahem!" said the young man, finding his enforced eavesdropping in the porch rather a painful process—for no one had come in answer to his repeated assaults on the bell.

There was an awful silence; then a little rustle, as if Cecil had crept further away from the window, and an awestruck whisper,—

"Nellie, Nellie! it must be a tramp! What shall I do?"

Nellie was evidently doubtful as to the best course of action to pursue; and Cecil came forward again to the window-ledge.

"I—we—have got nothing for you; so, please, go away," she said tremulously.

The young man—crimson with the effort of stifling his laughter—stepped out on the path, and took off his hat with a low flourish.

"I am so sorry," he said, looking upward at the girlish face above him, framed in its bower of roses, "not to be a tramp; but I really only want the—key of the church."

He had not at all intended to ask for the key of the church, but merely to discover the way to Madden Castle, whither he was bound; but, at the sight of the lovely flower-like face above him, the sweet blue serious eyes, and the low white forehead—round which the brown curls twisted in soft luxuriance—a wild impulse seized him of longing to remain in the girl's company for a short time, and the church key was the best means of communication that presented itself to his mind.

He was a handsome young fellow of about thirty or thereabouts, with a pleasant sunburnt face and dark eyes, and Cecil, as she looked down at him, blushed, realising how handsome he was.

"I am so sorry that I took you for a tramp. You see, no strangers ever do come to Madden," she said, gravely; "but I will come down at once and get you the church key out of papa's study."

There was a silence of a few moments, which seemed almost a lifetime to the impatient young man in the porch, and then the door opened and he confronted three people, instead of the one figure he had expected to see.

A white-haired old man, a pleasant-faced girl with a port, *retroussé* nose, and, bringing up the rear, looking rather important under her shady hat, the lovely lady of the rose-bower, for the sake of whose bright eyes he felt quite ready to endure the sight-seeing of a hundred churches—if necessary!

"I must introduce myself, sir, and apologise for this intrusion," he said, with a polite bow, which included the three.

"My name is Rufford, and I am an artist."

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Rufford. My name is West, and I was at Christ Church with a man of your name—Sir Luscombe Rufford. No doubt he was a relation?"

"He was," said the young man, evasively.

"But perhaps you will allow me to see the church before the light begins to alter; it strikes me as being a remarkable specimen of the hum—er—Early Gothic."

"Oh, dear no, my dear sir," said the Vicar, eagerly. "I can assure you that it's pure Norman, but my daughter Cecil will be glad to show you the beauties of the building, as I have to attend a meeting this afternoon. But we shall

be glad to see you at tea later on, if you have no engagement, and if you do not object to simple country fare," concluded the Vicar, with a courtly bow.

Much to her chagrin, Nellie Ford found herself obliged to depart, and to Rufford's delight Cecil demurely offered herself as his companion, and, quite as a matter of course, set off unchaperoned down the narrow garden path.

The churchyard walk was a very narrow one, and as there was no room for the two young people to walk abreast, Cecil had to turn round several times on their way, to explain the beauties of the exterior of the building to Rufford, who was closely following her.

He noticed that when she was excited, she had the faintest, most fascinating lip, that seemed to lend an additional charm to those delicately curved rose lips, which seemed formed for love and kisses.

"You see the tower," she said, pausing under the grey wall, and lifting one small white hand emphatically. "That piece of stone jutting out is the remains of a Roman altar; it is the only specimen in England of one built into a church."

Rufford was politely interested, though unfortunately he had seen several supposed Roman altars, none of them, however, exhibited by such a fair guide.

"Of course you speak from long experience and research," he said gravely, stealing surreptitious glances under the shady hat at the long lashes that shadowed her cheek.

"Oh, no," she answered innocently. "I have never been out of Madden. I once went to stay three miles off with an old aunt of mine, but the church there was a little iron one, with a bell that tinkled like a muffin bell, and a floor that heaved when you walked upon it."

She laughed a little at the recollection of her experiences, and he said with blank wonder—

"Have you never been out of Madden or the neighbourhood, Miss West?"

"No; but you must think me very silly," she said with a quick blush.

"Of course you have been everywhere, and seen everything. Do you know London well?"

Rufford restrained a smile.

"Yes, pretty well," he said.

"My brother Jem is a clerk in Mr. Vernon's office in Mincing-lane. Is it a nice place?"

she said rather wistfully.

"Oh, well you know—it all depends what you call a nice place," he answered, cheerfully. "I should think, probably, that he might have had much worse quarters. There is a good deal of tea, and things of that sort about. But I should think it was a good place to make a fortune in!"

"Oh, how nice!" said Cecil, clasping her hands ecstatically, we are so poor, and—"

Here she recollected herself, and went on hurriedly—

"I beg your pardon—how stupid I am—of course our affairs cannot interest you; now please come this way and notice the door, which is really a curiosity, for it is the skin of a real Dane!"

Rufford regarded the door with the veneration that seemed to be expected of him, and then said gently,—

"Pardon me, Miss West, but you are quite mistaken in thinking that I am not interested in your affairs. For one thing it is quite delightful to discover that everyone is not rolling in wealth. Artists, you know, are proverbially light of purse!"

"And you are an artist?" said Cecil, meditatively, regarding his irreproachable dark blue suit, that even to her unpractised eyes savoured of Sackville-street, and the exquisite diamond that fastened his tie.

His "get up" was in such perfect taste, that it looked no more out of place in this country churchyard than it would have done in the London streets in the height of the season.

If he was an artist, thought innocent Cecil, verily his lines must be cast in very pleasant places.

When they emerged once more from the cold greyness of the church into the brilliant June

sunlight that flooded the outside world, Rufford said smiling,—

"Isn't there a little sketch of some favourite spot that I could make for you, Miss West, before we return to the house, as a slight return for your guidance to-day, round this most interesting building?"

Cecil led him without a moment's hesitation to the corner of the churchyard where her mother lay buried.

"Will you draw that for me?" she said, softly. "My mother died when I was quite a little baby, and I often come here and wonder what she was like and if she would have loved me very dearly."

Rufford stood looking at the whole scene for a moment with a look of reverent pity stealing into his face. Then, almost unconsciously, throwing off his hat, he began to sketch in quick bold strokes.

The pathos of the scene and hour told upon him, and when he laid down his brush he felt that never before had he completed a sketch with such real satisfaction in the result.

It was a slight enough thing. The marble stone with its pathetic "Cecil, the dearly-loved wife of James West, aged 22 years."

The shadows of the green boughs of the chestnut tree above the grave, and the peep of azure sea and sky beyond, where the sparkling white-capped waves danced at the foot of the grey cliffs. And Cecil—the living Cecil—in her pink frock, the fairest spot of animate beauty in this quiet place.

But such as it was, it was complete, and he enjoyed her happy gratitude, as she thanked him for his gift, with a new feeling of pleasure and surprise. In this world gratitude was almost a thing of the past, and nothing under a diamond necklace could arouse even a pretence at a glow of rapturous delight.

He followed Cecil into the house, still wondering at her innocent childishness which was so evidently genuine.

She took him into the little drawing-room fresh with dainty muslin curtains and bunches of roses in every available corner, and then pulled out a wicker table, and began with charming housewifery pride to arrange the tea things.

The little maid in her big white apron, brought in the tray, and helped her young mistress to put out the pretty old-fashioned china, and the bright golden honey and delicious preserves and the crisp new bread and creamy butter that is the lot of those who live in the country of green meadows and flowing streams, and long stretches of purple heather which the bees love.

Rufford watched, as if fascinated, the slim figure as it tripped about the room serenely busy—he could have passionately kissed the soft pink thumb that curled so carelessly over the edge of his plate as Cecil handed him one by one the good things by which he was surrounded.

What an adorable little thumb it was. So exactly matching its mistress—with its filbert nail, pinkly tipped—and the soft lines of babyhood that still lingered in its curves.

But the Vicar's appearance broke in upon his meditation, and he had to rouse himself from his day-dream to the reality of facts, and to the consciousness that he was a poor artist, and must live up to the character.

The Vicar, in his gentle, garrulous way, told long stories of Sir Luscombe's doings at College, and of the wine, women, and horses that he loved; and, as the twilight drew on, Sir Luscombe's son, in the shadow of the deep embrasure of the window, smiled to himself as he realised that had it not been for the innocent deception that had turned him into plain Mr. Rufford—the artist—his father's sins would scarcely have smoothed the way for him to enter—on such terms of friendship and equality—the little country vicarage.

But there is a freemasonry in poverty, and as the distant relation of a wealthy baronet, whose manners bordered on the fast, the struggling artist was received with open arms into the simple family life of these two inhabitants of a new Arcadia.

CHAPTER II.

"RUFFORD OF RUFFORD."

THERE had never been a Rufford celebrated for his virtues or his brains.

They were all a good-looking, sporting set of men with a dash of foreign blood, inherited from an old Spanish ancestress, which gave them their artistic powers and their Bohemian tastes.

It had often been said of them that although they could with difficulty sign their names, yet that every Rufford could wield a pencil so soon as he could speak. And that to reproduce their ideas on canvases came as naturally to them as thought itself.

But Reginald Rufford, though the taint of Bohemianism was strong in his veins, possessed in a greater degree than most men, the capabilities of a domestic life.

He had had a strange career, and in his short thirty years of life, had seen as much of the world as many men see in the whole of their three score years and ten.

Wild Sir Luscombe, his father, had ended his career by a fall in the hunting field, when his only son was a schoolboy. And as he had lived, so had he died, unloved and unmourned, save by a few boon companions who regretted him for a day or two, and before the grass began to grow green above his bones, forgot that he had ever existed.

Lady Rufford, hating everything that bore the name or stamp of Rufford, married an old love within a year of her widowhood, and went to live in Florence, the land of sunlight and poetry.

Reginald was left in England in the care of a tutor, and saw little of his mother or the step-brothers and sisters who had sprung up in the new home on the Arno.

His mother's neglect had somewhat soured his nature and had turned his thoughts and affections in upon himself, so that he was in a fair way to become a cynic when he was launched upon the world.

At two-and-twenty he was a light-hearted bachelor, free as air, and absolutely heart-whole—the biggest catch of the season, a baronet—a baronet with good looks and fifteen thousand a year.

He danced and flirted through several seasons, wandering like a butterfly from flower to flower, but never doing more than taste the sweetness of each beauty that attracted his loving fancy.

Nemesis, however, found him out at last.

He had flirted once too often with Vanessa Lascelles, and the consequences had been disastrous to his bachelorhood!

Almost before he was aware that the momentous question had escaped him, he found himself engaged to the proud beauty of five seasons.

She would make a perfect Lady Rufford, a wife to admire and be proud of, with her coronal of pale golden hair, her brilliantly blue eyes, and perfectly correct features that no emotion had ever yet had power to soften.

So Rufford accepted his fate, and his fiancée, thankful that she was not too exacting in the matter of affection, and that she did not attempt in any way to curtail his freedom.

He had now just returned from a few weeks spent in Paris and Monte Carlo, and was on his way to Madden Castle to pay his first visit to the Lascelles in their country home.

And had it not been for his unexpected sight of Cecil's fair face he would have been engaged in tennis and small talk long before now!

He could not explain to himself why he did not now continue his journey, or why a pair of innocent girlish eyes should distract him from the contemplation of the serene blue ones of his rightful love!

But so it was; and true to his Rufford nature, he saw no reason at all why he should not gratify his desire, and see more of Cecil West; and why, just because he happened to be engaged to somebody else, he should avoid every pretty girl as though she had the plague!

Besides this she was just the type of girl he wanted for a new picture; and Miss Lascelles would never know that he had spent a few days in Madden before arriving at the Castle.

The Lascelles were so intensely uninteresting

when the veneer of society polish had worn off, and Rufford was fastidious.

Vanessa was, of course, charming—eminently charming; but the Wests had all the merit of originality, and Sir Reginald elected to gratify his inclination and to remain where he was, at least for the present.

Mr. West refused to allow him to take rooms at the "Three Furnaces," the little village inn; but insisted on his accepting his hospitality of the Vicarage for the next few days.

Those days were marked with a red letter in Rufford's life.

His mornings were spent in sketching in and about Madden with Cecil as his guide. His afternoons in reading aloud while the girl worked in the garden down by the cliff, or in lazily committing to paper the dainty profile, or the young delicious figure he had grown to know so well; and his evenings in walking in the twilight among the garden flowers, watching her, drinking in her every movement with eyes that were strangely passionate.

His very life had become bound up with hers, and no moment of the day was complete without her.

And Cecil herself?

She did not heed the laughing comments of her friend to tell her what she knew already. She was sure that Rufford loved her; but she was not yet sure of her own heart.

She had never known what love was, and how was she to recognise its presence in the joy she felt when Rufford was with her, or in the blank depression that accompanied his absence?

Her father noticed nothing, for he was too deeply absorbed in his books, to see the idyll that was being worked out before his very eyes.

It would have been a different matter had Cecil's mother been alive, for a woman's tender care would have shielded the young heart from danger.

But there was no one to warn Cecil, and if Rufford's conscience ever pricked him he stifled the inconvenient thought with the assurance that the girl cared not a button for his going or coming.

How was he to know that her pulses quickened at the sound of his footstep? Was he to gauge her feelings by the measure of his own?

One morning Cecil sat at her sewing in her boudoir. There was a pile of mending on her lap, and a big basket of tapes and needles at her side, but the tablecloth she was supposed to be darning had fallen on her knee, and her eyes were wandering away through the rose sprays into the garden.

She had resolutely torn herself away from Rufford's society that morning, and had declared with a fascinating attempt at severity, that she must be serious for once in her life, and get through a little of the weary mending which was accumulating so fast!

As she sat there a white rosebud struck the window-pane and fell at her feet.

"Miss West," said Rufford, from the garden, "aren't you coming out yet? Surely that mending is finished by now! The country is looking absolutely perfect, and we might go for a walk along the cliffs."

She paused for a moment until the bright blush upon her cheeks had died away, and then answered him gaily,—

"I am coming, Mr. Rufford, wait till I get my hat. You are one of the sworn enemies of diligence, and I can plainly see that you will never make your fortune by hard work."

The cliff walk was looking its fairest as Rufford swung open the wicket gate, and followed Cecil out on to the green path.

The sea lay breathing like a child asleep, wrapped in a soft, silvery veil that seemed to shroud its very murmur in mystery. The green clumps of samphire half way down the cliff, waved gently in the breeze, and here the brilliant rose of a sea pink starred the shale.

"Do you remember the first day that I came to Madden?" said Rufford, abruptly as he struck at an unoffending cluster of bracken with his stick.

"Yes, of course I do," she answered, suddenly, developing an intense interest in the horizon.

"Was it true what your friend then said; that you have never had a lover in your life?" he went on recklessly, blundering into all the thoughts that were in his mind, and throwing consequences to the wind. "Have you really never loved anyone? You surely can never have passed through even a day of your life, without coming across some poor, infatuated fellow, who, for the sake of your sweet face, would stake his very life for your love?"

"Mr. Rufford," said the girl, with an attempt at lightness, which did not however disguise the trembling of her voice. "How can I ever have had a lover, when in all my life I have only met about six men? Lovers don't come to Madden, it is too far out of the beaten track! Still I am sure that I don't know anyone, for—oh, yes, I do remember of course that I have had one. Mr. Marstrain, a clerk in the office where my brother works, once told me that he did—well, like me. He came down once from Saturday till Monday and they were the longest, dearest two days I ever remember."

Rufford laughed at this naive confession. It was a relief to him, and yet it ought not to have been a relief; what right had he, bound as he was to another woman, to feel the faintest pang of jealousy where Cecil was concerned?

"Mr. Marstrain! bah, what a name," he said. "I was beginning to be afraid that there must be some dear cousin Jem, with a broken sapphire in his possession of which the other half hangs on your watch chain."

"I shall never have a lover," said the girl, walking a little faster. "Love and marriage are made up of partings, and how could I ever leave my father?"

There was something so infinitely touching in the way in which she pronounced his name, that Rufford felt a lump rise in his throat as he recognised her innocent determination to put far from her such cold thoughts as age and death!

To outsiders, Mr. West was dying every day, and the time seemed only a short matter at the best, when Cecil would be left alone in the world to fight the battle of life.

"Need love mean parting?" he said, gently. "Dear one, love to you should be all joy, were it in my power to guide the hand of fate." He met that steadfast look in her clear eyes as she lifted them to his face, and before he could control the sudden wild beating of his heart, he had caught her hand in his. "Cecil!" he cried. "Don't you know that I love you?"

They stood facing one another for an instant, forgetting world, time and place in the intoxication of this new idea—new, and yet so old to both of them.

Reginald failed to hear the beat of horses' hoofs upon the cliffs behind them, and it was the girl who first caught away her hand, and turned to greet Miss Lascelles, with a brave attempt at indifference.

Vanessa was riding with her groom behind her, and she and her chestnut mare looked part and parcel of each other, both perfectly groomed and equipped. Cecil, with a blank feeling of dismay at her heart, recognised that something must be wrong, for Vanessa with her handsome, scornful face, was glancing from one to the other with an air of being perfect master of the situation.

"What? Sir Reginald Rufford playing at Arcadia?" she said, ignoring the existence of his companion. "How do you do? We all thought that you were still promenading on the Paris boulevards!"

Her clear words fell upon them like a knife, and it would have been hard to say which of the two looked the more conscience-stricken, innocent Cecil, or Rufford miserable in his sense of guilt or dishonour.

"And who is the nymph?" said Vanessa, half-turning in her saddle, and giving the final blow to Cecil's self-command, by scrutinising her coolly through her eye-glass. "Oh, little Miss West. How do you do, Miss West! How pleasant for Sir Reginald to be personally conducted along the cliffs!"

Cecil quivering with a sense of wrong which she could not explain turned to Rufford.

"I think I will go home again now, good-morning," she hesitated. She could not say Mr.

Rufford, for he had deceived her, and if in one thing, why not in everything.

He recognised her hesitation, and knew that his days in Arcadia were over, or that he had shattered her faith in him.

"I will follow you presently," he said, and she left them together.

Miss Lascelles knew that she had the whip hand of her lover for the first time in her life, and though she was not disposed to be merciful, still she was not disposed to lose her fish by striking too hard or too soon.

"I am sorry that I seem to have interrupted so interesting a conversation. Still, I think, Reginald, that you should remember that I have some little claim upon your time and thoughts."

She had turned a clever inflexion of pathos into her voice and manner, and one small gloved hand stole down into her *fiancé's* impassive one, with a would-be caressing air.

"I—I am very sorry, Vanessa," he said, lamely. "I have only been in England a day or two, and I was not even certain that you were at the Castle. Mr. West was an old friend of my father's, and—"

"And Miss West is a pretty girl. Never mind, Reg! I'll say no more about it. There are peccadilloes in both of our lives that we should not care to have exhibited in the light of day."

What was Rufford to do! There was such an evident resolution on Vanessa's part to ignore everything save their engagement, that he could do nothing but acquiesce.

It was not his place to turn over a woman who had trusted in his honour, and, with a sigh, he pressed her hand in reply.

"I shall come over to the Castle with all my traps this afternoon, Vanessa," he said, and, after a word or two they parted.

Yes; he must go at once. It would be better for him to put the very world between himself and Cissie's eyes. What was he to say to her? Of what use were excuses in such a case!

He had acted the part of a scoundrel he knew. But of the two women one was bound to him in the eyes of the world the other only in the eyes of his own heart.

Vanessa, as she rode homewards rapidly, displayed no trace upon her face of the storm that was raging within her, and it was only when she had gained the shelter of her own room that she allowed her feelings to have full vent.

"I hate her! I hate that piling, baby-faced girl!" she said between her clenched teeth; "and if ever I can be revenged upon her I will. For I can see in his eyes that he loves her. I hate her! I hate her!"

And the hatred of Vanessa Lascelles was no small matter.

CHAPTER III.

"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART!"

RUFFORD overtook Cecil just as she reached the garden-gate.

She was walking slowly, and her pretty head under its shady hat drooped tremulously, like the bell of some storm-beaten lily.

She did not turn as he approached her, but kept resolutely on her way, and he dared not look into her face, for he felt like a traitor.

"I shall leave the Vicarage this afternoon, Miss West," he said, abruptly. "Try not to think too hardly of me. Heaven only knows what my temptation has been, and what my punishment will be."

"You have deceived me," said the girl, and he scarcely recognised her voice with its hard ring of suffering running through every tone.

"You are not Mr. Rufford at all; and you are engaged to marry Miss Lascelles. Why did you come here at all? and why did you come under false pretences? We should have welcomed you quite as warmly, and more becomingly, had you told us that you were Sir Reginald himself."

"Don't reproach me," he said, hurriedly. "Surely my own conscience is reproach enough. It was a mad scheme on my part, and doomed to bitter failure, but, at least, we have been happy."

Happy? Her eyes met his at last, and she

found pity for his misery in the depths of her stricken heart.

"Cecil! Cecil!" he cried. Tell me only that you care for me a little and I will implore Miss Lascelles to release me from an engagement which must inevitably lead to misery. I love you and you only, and with you I might lead a different life. Must my last hope of higher things vanish with the touch of your scorn!"

"I shall never scorn you," began the girl, and then broke into bitter weeping.

She was not a heroine, and her self-command had left her for the moment. But Rufford's cup of humiliation was full, to the brim when he stood at her side powerless to help her—passionately longing to snatch her to his heart and still her tears with his kisses.

She recovered herself again in an instant, however, and faced him straight, and, white with the shadow of determination on her face,—

"I am weak and foolish to cry," she said, dashing the tears from her long lashes. "I shall never scorn you, Sir Reginald, but I am very sorry for you, and—very sorry for myself."

It was a weak admission, but he was too manly to take advantage of it.

"Must I do my duty, Cecil, and go back and marry Miss Lascelles?" he said, humbly.

"Yes; go to Madden Castle this afternoon. She loves you, I know, and you will soon forget me and these few days. If we each do our duty, perhaps happiness will come to us in time. At any rate, we are bound to suffer for our sin towards the girl to whom you are engaged. She will make you a much better wife than I ever could have done. Perhaps if you had married me you would have lived to repent it, for I should be no use to you in the public life which is your inheritance. Yes, go—go now before I repent and forget that you owe a debt of honour to Miss Lascelles."

She pushed him frantically away from her with rigid fingers, and he, suddenly stooping, caught her to his heart, and pressed one long kiss on her lips.

"Good-bye, sweetheart, for ever!" he said.

For an instant her head rested on his heart, and she felt its quick throb of suffering; then she tore herself away, and ran upstairs to her room.

Madden Castle was glowing with life and gaiety when Rufford reached it that afternoon.

He was in no mood for frivolity, and he bit his lips savagely as he was ushered into one of the drawing-rooms, where a crowd of smartly-dressed men and women were chattering over their five o'clock tea.

Some of them had been walking, some playing tennis, and they all stopped to stare at Rufford as he entered, with the consciousness of his importance in the castle domestic life.

Rufford caught one or two side remarks as he advanced to greet Vanessa, which did not serve to put him at his ease.

"A rattling good set, Miss Vane; five games love, and Trant has a regular Renshaw smash of his own. By Jove, that's Rufford; he doesn't look particularly pleased with himself."

And again from a round about little woman with a highly-coloured face, and a good many diamond brooches,—

"Ciel! Sir Reginald is a little *farouche* today. What a frown!"

"Perhaps he crossed last night, and was very sea-sick," whispered her neighbour, laughing.

Vanessa, stately in a clinging dress of some soft silk, that flashed opal like a dove's wing, rose to greet him.

She had put on her most becoming raiment, and her face was brilliant with smiles, for she had determined to make him forget the dowdy little country girl who had been so near bringing disaster into her camp.

But Rufford, as he bowed over her slender hand, and caught the glitter of the diamonds at her throat and on her fingers, gave one miserable backward thought to the sweet, innocent face he had left behind him in the wild Vicarage, and the slim, print-gowned figure that no diamonds could embellish, and which in his eyes was fair beyond compare.

Mr. Lascelles, a rather common-place old gentleman with a fussy manner, next claimed

his attention, and he was speedily launched in the vortex of current affairs, and found himself discussing the last moral of London scandal with a hawk-faced dowager, and wondering if it were possible that he should ever appreciate this sort of life again.

Vanessa watched him with a half-amused, half puzzled glance.

He would want more winning back to the old paths than she had imagined, but she had set her mind to the task, and cost her what it might she would triumph.

He was bound to her, and she would gild his chains, for in her way Vanessa loved him.

"Come out with me into the shrubbery," she said when the long weary dinner was over, and the guests were wandering out on to the smooth shaven lawn.

She twisted a flimsy piece of lace round her head and throat, and turned her satin draperies over her arm, as he followed her with a smothered sigh.

He was not sure as to what he was expected to discuss, but Vanessa was discretion and caution itself, and avoided every dangerous topic, leading the conversation round with consummate skill to the subject he liked best to discuss—his probable diplomatic career.

When he forgot his habitual *laissez-aller* condition of mind, and turned his thoughts to actual work, diplomacy was the groove in which his desires were bent.

He had every taste for that career, and Vanessa would be the very woman for an ambassador's wife, and her interest and his own, would push him forward until his feet were well up the rungs of the ladder of success.

"I am very ambitious for you," she said, gaily. "I have mapped out a great future for you, and Lord de Graeme declares that if any man succeeds, it should be you, with your brains and so much interest to back you. I shall love a brilliant life!"

She chattered so brightly, and painted his future in such glowing colours, that by degrees the cloud on Rufford's mind lifted, and he began to remember that his *fiancée* was beautiful, and gifted beyond measure.

He should be very proud of the future Lady Rufford; and perhaps, in the vortex of a brilliant society, he should forget that such a person in the world as Cecil West, had ever existed.

Vanessa was a clever woman, for she knew that if only a man be pricked in the proper quarter—the quarter of personal ambition—his self pride will sustain him through every trial.

She did not encourage the idea of Reginald's remaining long at the Castle, but urged him to return to London and take up his new career as soon as possible.

Perhaps the neighbourhood, since it contained Cecil West, was too dangerous, and she felt that her own attractions were not strong enough to counter-balance those of her rival.

The week that he remained with the Lascelles was crowded with engagements, and he had no time, even had he had inclination, to go over to the Vicarage to inquire after his late hosts.

He had never met Cecil since the day they had parted, for the girl had carefully shut herself within the garden walls, until such time as she should know that he had left the neighbourhood.

Mr. West had been a little surprised at Rufford's abrupt departure. But with the gentle confidence of age, he had guessed nothing of the tragedy that had been enacted within his gates, and he failed to notice the pathos of his daughter's face.

He had not connected the little girl of his imagination with a woman capable of love and passion, and that night when Cecil placed his Bible before him, that he might read the lesson for the evening, he said dreamily,—

"Poor little girl, you will miss your companion. He was a nice young fellow and wonderfully intelligent. If he marries Miss Lascelles, and they settle down at the Castle, it will be pleasant for you, for after all your life is a dull one."

He stroked her bright head softly, and Cecil for an instant felt a wild desire to fling her arms

round his neck, and to sob out her grief upon his loving shoulder.

But she refrained herself, for where was the use of giving way! Many tears could not quench the fact that Rufford had been false to her, and that he had won her heart in vain. It was difficult to bear her father's wonder and gentle garrulity, and the fact of Rufford's incognito.

"Such an odd thing to do—so very like the Ruffords! But he must have found our life very dull and uninteresting, after what he has been accustomed to! Still if I had known he was Sir Reginald, I should never have offered him our hospitality, for his father was a wild young fellow—and one never knows—one never knows!"

Cecil felt the excusing words leaping to her tongue, for she could not bear the faintest shadow of blame to rest upon the man she loved. But she kept them resolutely back, and tried to interest herself in the next topic of conversation that her father started, the wrongdoings of some pet old woman. But never had Betty Smith seemed so dull, or life altogether so grey, as they did at that moment.

Her pillow could have told a tale of many a sleepless night, and of many a tear shed in the quiet of the midnight room, but to the outer world Cecil was the same as she had always been, and her heart seemed untouched by the gallant who had so evidently admired and ridden away.

Half-a-dozen letters lay by Rufford's plate the morning on which he was to leave Madden, and one among them made his heart beat quicker, for it was in Cecil's handwriting. He took up his correspondence with an attempt at indifference, but Vanessa's lynx eyes saw the tremor of his hand, and guessed at the truth.

"Anything interesting, Reg?" she said lightly.

"One of mine is from a very great personage indeed, who is deeply interested in your career, shall we change correspondence?"

It was not often that Vanessa exhibited so embarrassing an interest in his letters, and Rufford said hastily,—

"Nothing of the least importance, Vanessa. Bills, duns, and business, describe my share of the postbag. Mr. Lascelles, what have the Labour party been doing now?"

And he plunged into politics.

When breakfast was over he rushed up to his room, and there among the debris of packing, tore open the little envelope, and stood devouring the well-known writing with his eyes.

"I am in great trouble," ran the note, and Rufford saw that the little hand had trembled as it penned these words:—

"Jem, my dear brother, Jem, has done something shameful—has robbed his employer to pay his gambling debts. I have to write it so plainly or you will not understand. Mr. Vernon threatens to prosecute him, and some one must go up to London to intercede for him. My father has broken down—the news has crushed him to the earth, and I am leaving for London to-night alone. Will you, when this letter reaches you, go and see how my father is? I shall not be there so that it will not be wrong, and Heaven knows that it will be a comfort to me in my awful sorrow to think that my father has some friend at hand who will console him.

"CECIL WEST."

"Poor little thing, poor child!" said Rufford, in a sudden passion of pity, as he pressed the letter to his lips. "What can she do in London? She, who has scarcely set foot beyond Madden in her short life. Vanessa may say what she will, but it is my duty to go and look after these people in their sorrow. I shall go to the Vicarage at once."

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the London train steamed out of the station, bearing with it Cecil West, a casual observer would hardly have recognised in the white-faced hunted-looking woman, the bright girl of but a few hours before.

She had shed no tear since that morning's letter had reached her, but in that short day she had lived out a tragedy.

She held gripped in her black-gloved hand the letter that had come from Mr. Vernon, Jem's employer. But she knew every word of that hard cruel letter, just as well as she knew the character of the man who had written it.

He had been her godfather, chosen for that office by Mr. West, with his usual absolute powerlessness to read character.

He had been an old friend of her mother's; but she had always disliked him with a girl's instinctiveness of good and bad. And his annual visits had been periods of trial to her from her childhood.

He had promised to look after Jem when he had made him junior clerk in his office, and this was what his promise amounted to.

"DEAR WEST,—

"For old times' sake I am truly sorry for the bad news I have to communicate to you. Your rascal of a son Jem has absconded with a sheaf of my banknotes, and on inquiry I find that he has become a regular gambler, and an altogether disgraceful character.

"Please come up at once and let us have a consultation as to the affair. If I do not see you I intend putting the detectives on his track, for after all, you may agree with me that the only way to cure a thief is to lodge him in gaol. The sum he has robbed me of is £500. Love to Sis.

"Yours truly,

"ALFRED VERNON."

Her bright-faced boy a thief!

Cecil kept repeating the words to herself, keeping time to the monotonous rhythm of the rattle of the train.

The letter had stricken her father to the earth, and had brought on the stroke of paralysis that had been so long impending.

She moaned now as she thought of the unconscious figure she had left behind her in the darkened room. Her place should have been at his bedside, but then who was to save Jem?

That he was older than her was of little account, for he had always looked up to his sister as to the stronger mind, and she had combined with her father to spoil and idolise the handsome yellow-haired lad, whose very weaknesses were fascinating.

Mr. Vernon's letter gave a pretty good insight into his character, and as she thought of him, the girl clenched her hands so that the nails pressed deep into her tender palms.

Why had not her father recognised the worthlessness of the man to whom he was entrusting his son?

Five hundred pounds! How was she ever to find such a sum to replace what Jem had taken? The whole of their slender resources would not equal a quarter of it, and her only hope lay in the arguments she might be able to urge in the boy's favour.

But where her father might have succeeded, she who had no old friendship to urge, would probably fail, and she sat staring out into the darkness with dry, tearless eyes, while the train sped through darkness with dry, tearless eyes, while the train sped through the silent country. When they drew up at the big London terminus, she shuddered back into her corner appalled at the very sight and sound of the bustling centre of the throbbing city.

But pulling herself together, she turned the stiff handle of the door, and stepped out, a lone, forsaken little figure on to the platform.

No one noticed her at first. She was not the sort of person to have much luggage, and she was not prominent enough to suggest tips to the busy porters.

But at last a kindly official took her under his protection, and packed her into a four-wheeler, shouting the address she timidly gave him, to the driver in stentorian tones.

A dreary drive it seemed to Sissie, as she leaned back among the dingy cushions, watching the dingier streets go slowly past; despair gripping her very heart-strings, in its deadly hold.

Yes, Mr. Vernon was in his office, and the girl sat waiting in the cab, while the shabby clerk took up her card.

The delay seemed hours, till the sound of the messenger's footsteps were heard upon the echoing stairs.

"Mr. Vernon's compliments, and you're please to walk up," he said, looking with a doubtful eye at her red-nosed cabman, and then at the lovely black-gowned girl who seemed as much out of place in these dreary surroundings as a pearl in a dirty room.

Cecil, tired with her long journey, and unwonted excitement, stumbled up the stairs that led to the office.

Mr. Vernon had only just arrived from his private house and was in a good temper after a luxurious breakfast, and a meditative glance at the *Times*. He was a bald-headed man, with a smooth shaven face and rather full lips that suggested a Sybarite nature, and Cecil felt that she hated him more than usual, when he rose to meet her with a smile.

He looked so sleek and self-satisfied, in spite of the careful way in which he turned down the corners of his mouth to endeavour to harmonise with his visitor's melancholy state of mind.

"Sit down, Cecil, I should be very glad to see you were it not for the melancholy occasion which brings you here," he said, pressing her hand warmly.

The girl sank down into the chair which he drew forward, while he sat regarding her furtively from under his arched hand—his back carefully turned to the light.

She was trembling so violently that it was all she could do to command herself sufficiently to ask the question which had been in her heart all the long, weary night.

"Have you found him? Oh, Mr. Vernon, the news has killed my father, and is breaking my heart!"

Mr. Vernon looked steadily at her. She was very lovely. Even her agitation detracted nothing from the delicate beauty that delighted his eyes.

Her figure in its tight-fitting gown was so perfect. Her every movement so artistic. His eyes slowly travelled over every detail of her country-made dress, and the grace it could not hide. What would she not be were she to be clothed in Bond-street, refined by luxury!

Into his mind flashed a thought that gave him greater satisfaction the more he considered it.

"Well, well," he said, smoothly, tapping the table with his ivory paper cutter. "Don't cry your pretty eyes out about it. The young black-guard is still at large. I have not begun to track him yet."

Cecil gave a long sigh of relief.

"I will work my life out to repay you what Jem has taken. Father is very ill, but we will devote every penny that we can scrape together to make up the five hundred pounds. I can go out as a governess you know, only, for the sake of old times, be merciful. Give Jem one more chance, he is so young, you know, and so very dear to us."

The cry of pathos in her voice was wonderfully effective, from an artistic point of view, and Mr. Vernon noticed that there were latent possibilities of passion in her nature, on which he had not reckoned.

"It would take a very long time to make up the five hundred pounds, and besides that, the example to my other clerks would be too disastrous," he said.

"But for the sake of old times. For the sake of my dead mother whom you loved, and for my broken-hearted father."

"I loved your dead mother so well that I hate your father for depriving me of her," he answered through his clenched teeth, showing for the first time, the tiger in his nature, which Cecil had only suspected till now.

She shuddered away from him.

"I did not know," she said, faintly, guessing at the deeper line of tragedy that lay beneath the surface, and sick at heart, as she realised that revenge might last, even for a lifetime.

"No, no," he continued, "I am talking nonsense. Sissie, you have grown into a very pretty girl, and ought not to be wandering about

London by yourself. Come back with me, and I will give you some luncheon and show you my house, and this afternoon we will see some sights."

"My father is dying and Jem is flying from justice," she flashed out: "do you think that I would eat or sleep until I have finished what I came up to London to do!"

"Well—well—sit down again, my dear girl, and let us think this over. There is one way by which you may save this young scamp. One thing, which if you do, I will promise to help him in every way in my power to succeed in a new life and to make a fresh start. It will be difficult, of course, to ignore his thieving propensities, but this I will promise you, Miss Sisie, if you will do what I wish you to do, all shall be as if it had never been, and no one will ever know Jem's fall, and Jem's flight save Marstrain and myself. But—if you refuse your part of the bargain, here lies a note for Scotland-yard already written."

He laid his hand on an envelope at his side, but there was a cruel smile on his lips of assured triumph.

"How can you doubt me," said Cecil, eagerly. "I will promise anything."

Her innocent eyes full of agony looked into his. It was evident that she had not the remotest idea of what the bargain could be.

"Promise that you will be my wife as soon as possible. I love you, Sisie, and I am very rich," he said, taking her hand.

Cecil shrank back against the wall, stunned by the absolute horror of the idea.

She, in all her youth and freshness, to marry this old horrible man!

The idea was so repugnant to her and so unreal in its unthought-of impossibility, that she forced a smile into her ashen face.

"You are joking with me, Mr. Vernon. For Heaven's sake—is this a time to jest?"

"I am as absolutely in earnest as you are," he answered, trying to steal one arm round her slender waist.

"Marry me and I will save Jem."

"Don't touch me," she shuddered, assured now of the truth of his meaning by the look on his face. "Give me time for thinking. How could I marry you—you old enough to be my father? I do not—I never could love you."

"It is done every day in this London of ours," he breathed into her ear.

"My love will be enough for both of us. I can load you with diamonds, and make you one of the most admired women in London."

"Don't touch me—leave me alone for a moment—I must think," she panted, turning her eyes from the face at her side.

And Vernon, finding she was in earnest, folded his arms and waited patiently.

Her eyes were fixed on the window, but her thoughts were far away.

She was on the breezy cliffs above Madden with Rufford. Her hand was in his—his lips upon her cheek.

She loved him, she knew, and how could she be false to herself and marry this man, the very sound of whose voice she detested.

She shrank from glancing at him now, for fear it should shake her gathering resolution.

"Is this the only way?" he said, and her voice was so altered that Vernon positively started with astonishment at its rigid accents fell upon his ear.

But she was in his power, and he gloated over the fact.

"I am afraid so," he answered, marvelling at her beauty and her despair.

"I will marry you," she said, "don't touch me, or I might kill you, for you have taken a cowardly advantage over me. Promise me, on your honour, that if I marry you, you will save Jem."

The door behind them creaked furtively, but they neither of them noticed it in the extremity of their agitation.

"I promise you—upon my honour that I will reinstate Jem in his former position and help him by every means in my power, when we are married," he said, hurriedly.

Her thoughts went swiftly back to her golden-haired boy. Would Jem ever realise what she

had done for him? Would he see that she had sold herself, to save him from sorrow?

Mr. Vernon crept nearer to her, and before she was aware of his presence, he had passed his arm round her, and his face was close to hers.

"I must clench the bargain by a kiss, you know, my pretty one," he said, and the listening face at the creaking door grew dark at his words, so dark, that in another moment it would have been bad for the delighted bridegroom.

But something in the girl's face made Mr. Vernon draw back, and stammer out some words of apology.

"Just in time," she said, raising one white clenched fist. "I should not like to have struck you. Remember this—our arrangement is a pure business bargain and nothing else. If you presume upon it, I may, perhaps, break my word. Now I am going back to Madden, but before I go, let me tell you that I hate and despise you for the part you have played to-day."

Did ever such words fall on any bridegroom's ears? Mr. Vernon, however, did not happen to be at all put out by them.

"Love will come by-and-bye," he said, rubbing his hands together with a smile. "I am not at all afraid of the future, and as soon as possible I shall come down to arrange for our wedding. Let me take you to the station now at any rate."

"Stay there," said the girl, and he dared not disobey her.

When she had left the room, he sat down to think.

He had certainly made a good bargain for himself out of the whole business.

How beautiful the girl was, even in her anger, and he chuckled to himself as he thought that marriage would soon tame her.

"I shall be envied by all my friends," he said, "and what a mistress of the house she will make—how glorious she will look at the head of my table! Well—well I must write a few letters now in preparation for the event. I should think we might be married next week by special license."

And with a chuckle he turned to his writing-table and took up his pen.

The letters must have been difficult to compose, for an hour later he was still in the same position, and an hour later again, when one of his clerks looked in upon him, the rigid hand had still traced no line upon the white sheet. There was something so odd about the whole figure, that Haynes took the liberty of giving a little closer to him, and in a moment a shriek rang through the whole building, startling the very sparrows from the chimney. For Mr. Vernon was quite dead, and a dagger was thrust into his very heart under his left shoulder blade.

CHAPTER V.

"THE VENGEANCE HAS BEGUN."

THE reasons that took Vanessa to London were very complex.

When Rufford in a weak moment, longing for sympathy, showed her Cecil's pathetic note, and announced his intention of going to the Vicarage, Vanessa's lynx eyes took in the whole situation.

Mr. Vernon was a business acquaintance of her father's, anxious always to propitiate so important a client.

Were he to prosecute Jem West, the family name would be dragged through the mud of public opinion. Were he to forbear, no one would know of the disgrace that pressed so heavily upon the girl Rufford loved.

She determined in one flash of quick thought, to go straight up to town and set the whole machinery of the law against the runaway clerk by every persuasion in her power.

Cecil might be a dangerous rival now, but with a disgraced name, Rufford would never dream of marrying her. He would the rather regard her with pity. And pity is one of the most dangerous enemies that love has.

"You cannot blame me, Vanessa, for trying to help this poor old man, stricken to the earth with his grief!" said Rufford, looking down at her, as she sat with Cecil's letter on her knee.

"My dear, Reg, no," she answered.

"And to show you how deeply I feel for that poor girl in her trouble, I intend to go up to town at once by the next train, and go straight to the house of business where her brother was employed, and find her out and comfort her by every means in my power."

"Vanessa!" cried Rufford, his eyes kindling with gratitude: "you are a noble woman, and I thank you from my heart."

And so it came to pass that the train carrying Vanessa Lascelles up to town, crossed the return train bearing Cecil West back to Madden.

When Miss Lascelles reached the offices in Mincing lane, over which the name of Vernon was written, she asked in a business-like way to be shown straight up to the principal's private room, as she had a previous appointment with Mr. Vernon, and the clerk knowing her well by sight, did as she requested, and left her at her command standing outside the ante room door, to make her own arrangements.

She was very anxious to avoid catching sight of Cecil, for of course she did not know that the girl had already left London.

"I suppose that the young lady who arrived this morning is still with Mr. Vernon!" she said haughtily, as the clerk bowed and left her.

"Yes, madam," he replied, "Mr. Vernon told me that she would spend the night in Russell-square, and that he intended to have a holiday this afternoon. He may, perhaps, already have left the office, as his staircase is a private one, and he comes and goes without telling us."

"I will wait here a few moments alone. I fancy that I hear voices in his private room now, and I have no wish to break in upon any business that may be going on."

Marwood went downstairs, and Vanessa stood still for a moment, and then crept like a panther to the curtained door of Mr. Vernon's private room, which stood ajar.

Some one was closeted with the merchant, certainly, for a voice was speaking at that instant, and Miss Lascelles bent down her queenly head in the ignominious attitude of a listener.

It was not, however, Cecil who was speaking, but a voice she knew fairly well as being that of Marstrain, Mr. Vernon's chief clerk.

She opened the door wide enough to catch a glimpse of the interior of the room.

Marstrain was stooping over some one fronting the window, who Vanessa saw was Mr. Vernon in his chair at his escritoire. There was something so odd about the merchant's attitude, as he leaned heavily against the high arms of his chair, that Vanessa's heart beat quickly as she stood, with presentiment of a tragedy.

Marstrain had his hands clenched, and was speaking in a low voice, his utterance half choked by passion.

"Good Heavens!" he said, "that a thing like you could insult a girl pure and beautiful enough to be a heavenly angel! The earth was well purged of a reptile when I sent you back to your father the devil. A Corsican strikes easily and scientifically, so I fear you had no pain and no fear. If I had had my way, I should have tortured you, just as you tortured Cecil West this morning!—venomous snake that you are! I have blunted your sting."

Marstrain was so evidently mad with the passion of his revenge, that, although Vanessa's nerves were cold and hard as steel, she shuddered at the first instant of realising what had happened.

But there was no weapon near at hand so far as she could see, so that she had not to dread personal violence. And there was so much to be gained by a little manoeuvring that her brain reeled with the magnitude of the idea which began to flash in upon her.

She would gain her lover now, and blast her rival's very name with infamy!

At the sound of her step, Marstrain turned round blanched and distorted with fear.

He was a swarthy dark-featured fellow, with more of the Corsican than the Italian about him, and Vanessa shivered as she saw his hand flash towards his breast in instinctive search for the stiletto which was not at hand.

But she was complete mistress of the situation,

and her coldness and contempt fell like icy water upon the passion of his nerves.

"Mr. Marstrain, I know enough to hang you at any instant. Move one step nearer to me and I shall shout for help in a voice that will bring every being in this building to my rescue."

Marstrain's hand trembled down again to his side. Like all villains, he was a coward in his calmer moments, and, now the first flush of his passion had died away. To his excited foreign brains, Miss Lascelles seemed to be some minister of vengeance.

She looked so tall and magnificent as she stood huddling back with one hand her heavy cloak, her hair under her plumed hat shining like an aureola round her head in its brilliantly gold masses.

He quivered, cast one backward glance at the awful motionless figure in the chair, some visions of the gallows flashing across his distorted brain as he did so. Then, with swift abandonment, he flung up his hands and burst into whimpering tears.

"He insulted the girl I loved," he moaned. "She had promised to marry him, and there was nothing to do but to kill him. They will hang me now, I suppose!"

"Not a bit of it, if you do what I bid you," said Vanessa, swiftly, feeling that, hard as she was, she could not long remain in the room with that awful figure.

"Go at once down the private staircase back to your own room, and be there when the alarm is raised. They will understand your emotion at hearing the frightful news. I shall have to go and rouse the house, so be prompt. This will, I think, turn suspicion on some one else."

She sprang forward as she spoke, her eyes glittering with triumph, and took from the floor a little gauntlet glove, inside which was scrawled in ink "Cecil West!"

"No, no!" cried the writhed man, in sudden agony. "Anything but that!—anything—I will confess. Give me the glove!"

Vanessa stood up straight, a cruel smile upon her face.

"Hanging is a painful and ignominious death," she said slowly.

His hand relaxed, and his head fell forward on his breast.

"Don't hurt her!" he said, feebly.

"Fool that you are, do you think I want to hang her? She loves the man to whom I am engaged, and he alas! loves her. I wish to throw a shade of discredit upon her so that his love may return to me. Now, do you understand?"

"I love her too," said Marstrain, rapidly.

"You will save her in time from the gallows!"

"Not a hair of her head shall be hurt. I can easily save her, and you shall marry her," answered Miss Lascelles.

"She will be glad enough to find shelter in your arms after the ignominy of the world has been cast upon her."

The Corsican stood for a moment considering the case in every aspect, his face working with emotion, the veins on his forehead standing out like thick ropes.

He was struggling between deeper infamy and the desire that was growing upon him of restitution.

Was he to suffer the innocent to be accused so that his own ends might be compassed?

But then his love for Cecil was so despairing and so passionate. She loved another man, and now perhaps a lucky chance was about to turn her into his own arms.

Could he reject that faint chance and give himself up to the gallows?

No; a thousand times, no!

"You will swear to save her!" he said, thickly.

"I swear!" cried Vanessa, stamping her foot upon the ground. "Go this instant, or it will be too late."

And with a moan like a beaten hound, Marstrain crawled noiselessly away.

When Vanessa was left alone with the dead she listened till every sound of the Corsican's footsteps had died away on the stairs; then hurriedly picking up the glove again she placed it upon the writing-table close to the dead man's hand.

As she did so a sudden thought struck her with dismay.

Was the dagger which had dealt the deadly stroke one belonging to Marstrain? If so all her planning would be in vain, for the murderer would be self convicted.

Overcoming her natural repugnance, for she was a woman in spite of her vices, she bent down behind the rigid figure, and scrutinised the dagger that projected so horribly from the dead man's shoulder.

On the handle was engraved in mosaic letters which stood out clearly from the silver toy, "A. Vernon."

The relief of the discovery turned her faint and sick for a moment, for she had dreaded the collapse of her deeply laid plans, more than she was at first able to realise.

No one would guess that Marstrain had had a hand in his master's death, for none would know that he had been absent from his own private room during the time of the murder. And the relations between Vernon and his confidential clerk had always been most cordial.

The next step was to arouse the house, and Vanessa was quite equal to that emergency.

The clerks, sitting at their desks in the counting-house, were amazed at the sudden appearance among them of a beautiful woman.

Marwood, who had conducted Miss Lascelles up to Mr. Vernon's private room, came forward.

"Can I do anything for you, madam?" he said. "Did you find Mr. Vernon?"

Vanessa clasped her slim ungloved hands. She was evidently labouring under some horrible emotion.

"I am so terrified," she said, "I fear there is something wrong with Mr. Vernon. I waited a long time in the ante-room thinking that he must be engaged, and when at length I looked through the door he was alone and so silent. Will you go up and see, I am afraid he is ill!"

Haynes being nearest the door, went rapidly out, and when the awful truth was discovered Vanessa turned pale and trembling to one of the clerks,—

"You know who I am," she said, "and can refer to me if I am wanted. I shall return to Madden Castle now."

And she left the office, walking rapidly up the street till she hailed a vacant hansom, and drove off to the station. When she reached Madden she ordered her coachman to drive straight to the Rectory, and the man wondering, obeyed her.

"Is Miss West at home?" she said to the frightened maid-servant who answered the door. But not waiting for her reply she pushed her way into the house, and opened the drawing-room door.

Rufford and Cecil were together, while the doctor was upstairs with old Mr. West.

The poor girl, overstrung with her terrible experiences of that day, was waiting in silent agony for Dr. Ford's verdict.

And in the evening light, which was flooding the little room, even Vanessa hardly recognised her, so altered was she in her haggard beauty.

Rufford was holding her hand in his, but she was scarcely aware of his presence, and she turned her eyes upon Vanessa with a bewildered look in them which told of a mind distraught.

"Vanessa, comfort her!" began Rufford, scarcely taking his eyes off the face that was so dear to him.

But Vanessa, terrible in her vengeance, approached, keeping her cold eyes fixed upon the girl's piteous face.

"Woman," she said, "you are a murderess. Mr. Vernon is dead; he lies there with a dagger thrust into his back, and your glove clenched in his hand."

Cecil gave a feeble cry at these awful words. She was too much overcome in body and mind to attempt to deny them. The surprise was too great for her to bear, and before Rufford could catch her, she fell to the ground in a dead swoon.

"What have you done, Vanessa, what do you mean?" thundered Rufford catching Miss Lascelles roughly by the arm.

But Vanessa with a cutting laugh, pointed to the motionless figure between them.

"Ask her," she said; "I cannot hold any communication with a murderess!"

And she left them together.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE WATERS OF ADVERSITY."

So deeply was the web woven around Cecil's innocent feet that it appeared to the outside world as though she—and she only—had been guilty of Mr. Vernon's murder.

She had been the last person proved to have seen him alive, and it was her glove that had been found near his dead body.

To Vanessa's horror, Rufford, instead of turning his back upon the girl he loved so deeply, announced to the world that his engagement with Miss Lascelles was broken off, and after a short, stern interview with Vanessa, in which he told her more home truths than she had ever heard in her life, he announced his intention of marrying Cecil West so soon as she would consent to become his wife.

Not even to her lover would Cecil confess the awful fear that paralysed her every hope of being proved innocent. The person whom she felt sure must be the guilty one, was her brother Jem, for he was the only human being so far as she knew, who bore a grudge against the merchant.

"I am not guilty, Reginald, you know," she said piteously to her lover, when she had recovered sufficiently from the shock to face the awful charge.

"I came back to Madden fully prepared to marry him, to save Jem from being prosecuted, I hated him, alas, but I could never have killed Mr. Vernon."

"Sweet one, I know," said Rufford, touching her bright hair with his lips.

The terrible affair had made a new man of him, and he had left behind him in the old life he had fore sworn, his indolent habits and ways of life.

"Marry me at once, my darling, and we will face the trouble together," he went on earnestly. "Cecil, give me the right to protect you, and we will be married immediately."

"I will never marry you till my name is completely cleared," she answered, looking into his face with her resolute eyes.

"When I am cleared of this charge of murder, which looks so strangely black against me now, you may ask me that question once again, for now the secret of Jem's misdeeds rests only with Mr. Marstrain and myself, and I think that for my sake Mr. Marstrain will keep silence."

That week was an awful one for the two lovers, for the waters of adversity flowed deeply over Madden Vicarage, and the hearts it contained within its walls.

Mr. West lingered only a day after Cecil's return from London, and died without having regained complete consciousness.

To the last he held his daughter's and Rufford's hands in his, and in his weakness he thought that Rufford was his golden-haired boy Jem, and besought him to take care of his little sister.

"She is so young, such a child, my boy," he said feebly, "never leave her, for I trust you, Jem;" and Rufford, through the scorching tears that were filling his eyes, promised to be faithful to the girl he loved.

Then the old man fell to babbling of his youth and the golden way that was opening out before him, and so died, holding out his hands to take the hands that were stretching out to him from the further shore.

"I cannot wish him back again," cried Cecil, through her piteous tears, as she folded the cold dead hands on his breast. "The knowledge of this trouble would have broken his heart. See, Reginald, what a lovely smile is on his dear face, he must be walking with my mother in the golden fields of Paradise."

Those were the last tears that Cecil shed for many days. The horror of her situation seemed only to dawn upon her in its fulness when she was arrested for the murder of Alfred Vernon, and taken to London.

They were merciful days of black darkness that followed, through which she only seemed

conscious that Rufford was beside her whenever it was possible, his hand in hers, his strong voice cheering her and telling her to be of a good heart, for never yet did guilt go unpunished.

Jem had not been discovered, though every possible search had been made for him when the detectives discovered what had been the errand that had taken Cecil to London.

Cecil had one other friend with her in her imprisonment, one on whose faithful heart she had sobbed out many of her griefs. For from the moment that she was declared a prisoner of the law, Nellie Ford had never left her, but had braved everything to be with her friend.

After the inquest when Vanessa's and Marstrain's witness had been so black, that a verdict of wilful murder had been brought in against Cecil Emmeline West, Rufford sought his last interview with Miss Lascelles. He had been in court the whole time, leaning with folded arms against a pillar just within sight and sound of what was going on. Vanessa, calm and beautiful in her exquisitely fitting blue serge gown, was speaking to one of the lawyers when Rufford approached her. She broke off from her conversation for a moment, and looked at him with such undisguised triumph in her cold blue eyes that he started back at the revelation of so much malice.

"Miss Lascelles," he said in a firm low voice, "I have followed your evidence to-day, and a bigger tissue of lies was never woven in this weary world before. By every means in my power I will strive to punish the woman who for malicious envy has done her best to take a successful rival's life."

Vanessa turned pale. She tried to answer but her tongue refused its office, and when she recovered from her surprise, Rufford had turned on his heel and left her.

Marstrain had given his evidence in a strangely reluctant fashion. And his eyes had constantly wandered to Vanessa's cruel face while he spoke.

But it had seemed only natural to everyone concerned, that he should have been unwilling to bring to justice the beautiful prisoner of whom the papers had been so full.

In one point only had he been uncertain, and that was, as to the position that the dagger had occupied in Mr. Vernon's office.

He had declared that it had hung over the chimney-piece, and no one had contradicted this statement until one of the clerks was put into the witness-box and announced that two days before the murder, it had vanished from the merchant's office, and that there had been some little fuss made as to its disappearance.

"I—remember now," interrupted Mr. Marstrain rapidly. "I replaced it the very morning in Mr. Vernon's room—it had been cleaned."

"Pray collect your ideas, Mr. Marstrain," interposed the coroner severely, and the incident passed off.

When once the long weary machinery of the law had been set in motion, it seemed no time till the day of the trial arrived, and Cecil had to face her accusers, and to take her place in the dock, charged with murder.

The court was crowded, as was natural, owing to the sensational aspect of the case, and the whispers that had crept abroad as to the relation between the murdered man and the prisoner. Most of those present believed her to be innocent, and even those who had closely followed the case could not help thinking that she was the victim of a fatal mistake.

Marstrain and Vanessa were sitting together. He with head down bent and sullen face, she playing with her smelling salts in their gaudy enamelled case, with a fine air of indifference. Marstrain lifted his head, as a hum through the court announced the arrival of the prisoner.

He had not seen her since the day of the murder, and he was not prepared for the change that her sorrow had wrought in her.

She was very quiet in her manner, hardly seeming to realise that she was being tried for her life. Her eyes large and mournful, with deep circles round them, were fixed above the heads of the crowd below her, as though she could see through the dreary court-house into a brighter world beyond.

She was gowned in heavy black, with no lightening of white round the throat or wrists, so that her deadly pallor was enhanced, and what smote Marstrain to the heart was, that one lock of her soft chestnut hair had turned snow white, and lay like a flake of snow upon her temples.

There was a singing in Marstrain's brain which rendered him deaf to all else save that the girl he loved was before him. Till he woke to the consciousness that Rufford had taken his place as near her as possible, and that Cecil's eyes met him for an instant, and a wave of something like pleasure passed across her face.

Then, and only then, did Marstrain realise that he had sinned for nothing—that neither shame nor disgrace can part the love that has once been unconditionally given.

Through a mist of voices and sounds, it suddenly dawned upon him that Mr. Prevost, the lawyer for the prosecution, was speaking, and he turned to listen.

"Grieved though we must all feel that so young a girl can have been led away to commit so grievous a crime, there is not a shadow of doubt existing in my mind, that Miss West stabbed Mr. Vernon on the morning of the twenty-fourth last. And, therefore, there is but one verdict that any sensible jury can bring in; namely that she is guilty of wilful murder," concluded the hard-faced lawyer.

"Gentlemen of the jury and my lord!"

There was a rustle of astonishment in the court, for it was Marstrain who had risen to his feet, and, clutching at the rail in front of him with nervous fingers, began to speak in a clear voice.

His pallid face, and passionate eyes under their heavy brows, were lit up by a ferocity of determination which swept away all obstacles in its course, like the rush of some stream in flood.

Vanessa, seeing what was inevitably coming, rose to her feet, and passed swiftly and unnoticed from the court.

"Gentlemen of the jury and my lord, I have a story to unfold which at once puts an end to this farce of a trial. I murdered Alfred Vernon on the morning of the twenty-fourth last. I loved Miss West, and happened to overhear an interview in which Mr. Vernon made her promise to be his wife, on condition that he refused to prosecute her brother for theft. The dagger with which I stabbed him had been kept in my room for some days, and I alone had access to it—my servant will corroborate this if you ask him. I stabbed Mr. Vernon immediately after Miss West had left the room, and Miss Lascelles knew alone that I was the murderer. She did what she did for jealousy—I for love. May Heaven forgive us for both!"

There was an instant of horrified surprise, and in that instant Marstrain drew from his pocket a small glass phial containing some colourless liquid, and, with one quick upward motion of his hand, swallowed the contents.

Then, and then only, did the tension of the court relax, but it was too late. The poison that Marstrain had swallowed had been some deadly Italian drug, and, even as they rushed towards him, he tottered and fell forwards a corpse.

"Good heavens!" said the judge, leaning over into the body of the court. "What is the outcome of this awful tragedy?"

"My lord, he is dead! The bottle contained tofana," said one of the lawyers, as he laid the lifeless head back upon the boards.

"And the next question is: Where is Miss Lascelles?"

CHAPTER VII.

"THE NIGHT IS STILL DARK."

VANESSA LASCELLES had vanished as completely as though she were dead.

When she left the court that afternoon, knowing, as she must have done, that she was disgraced for ever in the eyes of the world, she must have returned straight to Maiden Court, and from thence fled to the Continent.

It was pre-umed that Mr. Lascelles knew of

his daughter's whereabouts, for when the first shock and horror of the affair had blown over, he sold his estate, and also went abroad.

It was rumoured that two persons, whose description answered exactly to that of Vanessa and her father, had bought a lovely villa in the South of France, and were living there quietly. But, as no one followed up the clue that had been given, the Lascelles died as completely out of the world as though they had never entered it, and, as is the way of the world, no one regretted them.

When the formalities of the acquittal were completed and Cecil was free once more, Rufford came to her and implored her to become his wife at once.

"You have no home," he said; "my darling, let me give you the shelter of my home and my love."

She was sitting in the quiet lodgings that he had taken for her, leaning her head on her hand, and staring out into the grey streets she had grown to hate so bitterly.

She looked up at him, and, and, had he been able to take in more than the fact that she was beautiful and that he loved her, he would have noticed that her eyes were full of a strange light, and that her lips bore a smile of almost ecstatic determination.

"I will give you your answer to-morrow," she said, going up swiftly towards him, and laying her tired head against his heart for an instant. "Come here to-morrow morning, and you shall have your answer. Only, I pray you, trust and love me through all things."

He could not see her face, but in her voice was the sound of pent-up tears, and he gently touched her bended head with his lips.

"I shall come to-morrow, sweetheart. You are quite overstrung with all the horrors you have lately had to endure. From the time that a certain plain gold band goes on your pretty finger, you shall have as bright and happy a life as though sorrow had never existed for you."

"And Jem?" she whispered.

"Jem, oh!" and she could detect the faintest shadow of impatience in his voice.

"Jem is doubtless very happy somewhere else carving out a new life. We will look for him if you like, my dearest. But at any rate, let us think of our own happiness first."

Cecil lifted her head—the light of a high and holy resolution making her face more beautiful than that of a crowned saint.

"Believe me, Reginald, your happiness is my first thought, and will be for ever, so long as I live."

He kissed her quivering lips cheerfully.

"Now farewell till to-morrow Sissie. I am going off to make all the arrangements for our wedding—for I know what your answer will be."

"Wait till to-morrow," she whispered with white lips; but he had gone, and she sank back into her chair, and burst into an agony of weeping.

Rufford went straight to Bond-street, where he spent a small fortune in one of the best known of the jewellers' shops in that fairy land of delight.

He chose a lovely moonlit sapphire ring, set in a firmament of diamond stars for her engagement ring, and trinkets without end to adorn her person.

Then, entering another shop, he invested largely in perfumes and lace and the daintiest of gloves, which he longed to see on those slim hands that had gone so shabbily gloved all the days of their life.

He smiled to himself as he imagined her delight in opening the mysterious parcels, and of his own pleasure in clothing her in the richest and rarest garments that could be found.

"I shall soon bring back to her sweet face all the dainty loveliness that sorrow has set so sad a seal upon," he said to himself as he walked back to his hotel, happy as though his golden dreams were already realised.

Early next morning he hurried off to Wendover-street, and rang the bell.

The landlady answered it, and Rufford noticed that her grim face bore traces of recent tears.

"Well, all right Mrs. Prodders!" he said

cheerily, trying to push past her into the passage.

"You won't find her there, sir," said the woman making way for him. "She left at day-break this morning, the sweetest and best of all creatures upon this earth, and one as tries to do her duty. She says to me: 'Mrs. Prodgers' she says, 'I must go and find my brother, and when Sir Reginald comes back, just you give him this note.' I shall miss her, for the house won't seem the same without her. She's a saint, she is!"

Rufford mechanically seized the envelope from the landlady's fingers, and rushed on into the little sitting-room.

It was empty. Every trace of her had vanished, save that a half-withered rose she had worn at her throat the day before lay in the fire place.

Rufford picked it up, and thrust it into his breast, then he opened her letter.

It was blotted with tears, and as he read it, his own gathered thick and fast in his eyes, for he could imagine her scribbling these last words to him with a breaking heart.

It ran thus:

"MY DEAR LOVE,

"For no one else save you shall ever bear that title, I have made up my mind that we must part, at least for a time.

"My first duty is to find my brother, and that is a task I must undertake alone, for if he is in trouble the very sight of a stranger might be too much for him. Then, in spite of your love for me which would put aside all objections, I cannot forget that my name is a tarnished one, unfit to be matched with yours.

"You may think now that this would make no difference to your happiness, but if by chance when the first glamour of your affection had worn off, you began to regret that you had ever married me, my heart would break.

"I mean to keep away from you for a whole year, and though I shall be safe, you will never be able to find me.

"You are free as air, and if you should ever meet another woman with a spotless name whom you felt that you could love, forget that Cecil West ever existed, or remember only that she would rejoice in your happiness.

"And now farewell, my truest and best of lovers. If you still wish to make me your wife, I will return to you this day next year, on the cliff path at Madden where my happiest days were spent. Do your best through life till we meet again.

"CECIL E. WEST."

"Heaven helping me, I will be there," said Sir Reginald bringing down his hand with a mighty thud upon the table at his side.

"She is a good woman, and I will spend my life in trying to be worthy of her. But I will find her, even though she were under the mighty sea."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY BEGINS TO DAWN.

CECIL had already secured fresh lodgings in the dreary neighbourhood of Brixton, so that when she left her city rooms she drove at once to Margaret-terrace, and deposited there her few possessions.

Everything at Madden Vicarage had been sold, and with the proceeds of the sale, and a sum subtracted from her tiny fortune, she had already paid off the debt to Vernon and Co., and the successors to the business had not only promised to forgive the defaulting clerk, but even to reinstate him in his old place as soon as his whereabouts was discovered.

Jem seemed to have vanished as completely as though he had never existed, and although she searched for him, night and day, she found no trace of him.

Haynes, one of Mr. Vernon's clerks, had given her an address, which had turned out to be that of a hiding-place, which Jem had just vacated. And so it went on from day to day, until every

clue had been exhausted, and Cecil had to face the fact that Jem was determined to be lost to the world.

Meanwhile, she must live, and in some way must earn her daily bread. So, thinking she possessed some small talent for teaching, she suddenly remembered the existence of an old governess, who had established a boarding-school for young ladies in the neighbourhood of Brixton, and was reported to be doing very well.

So, putting on her neatest gown, and a thick veil, Cecil went in search of Miss Popple. Miss Popple's high class seminary for young ladies was a dreary-looking house with very prim curtains of exactly the same pattern in each window. Red bombazine on the outside, and white lace on the inside.

There was a black knocker too, which gave forth a muffled peal as Cecil applied it, and which she discovered was due to the existence of a small flannel pad judiciously applied. Noise was evidently a thing discouraged at Popple House. When the gaunt, black silk clad form of her old governess entered the little sitting-room where Cecil was trying to look collected among a whirl of wax flowers and parian statuettes under glass shades, the girl rose to meet her tremblingly. Miss Popple had never been very fond of Cecil, though she had tried to do her duty by her, and this was the exact expression that every line of her face expressed.

"How do you do, Cecil?" she said, putting out a bony hand and offering a limp, cold cheek for the kiss that the girl dutifully implanted in the very centre of a hard cheek bone.

"What an unfortunate affair this has been." "Please don't talk about it, Miss Popple, let us take it all for granted," said the girl with a shudder. "What I come to you now for, is to beg you to give me some work, for I must earn the bread that I eat."

"And what?" said Miss Popple, seating herself slowly on the edge of a worsted worked chair, and folding her hands on her creaseless lap, "and what has become of the baronet who was reported to be going to marry you?"

"I felt that it would not be honourable to marry him until he is quite sure that his love for me is as strong as he believes it to be at present, and therefore I have left him for a year. If in the meantime he finds someone for whom he cares, he is free, and if not, Heaven will bring us together again some day in good time.

"H'm!" said Miss Popple dubiously. "No doubt you are right. I will endeavour to do my duty by you, my love, but I must first ask you whether you object to being called Miss Cecil, and dropping your surname which is perhaps a little too well known just at present."

"I have no objection if you will find me some work. I have got lodgings for myself not far from here, where I wish to live, so that if Jem ever returns he will come home to me."

(Continued on page 115.)

FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

—101—

CHAPTER XVII.

BRIGHTON rarely looks gloomy, being one of those places which present a tolerably cheerful front to spectators under most circumstances, but fate surely did not favour Iris Belden, for—as the oldest *habitués* of Princess House remarked to each other—never had the gay seaside town looked more dreary than on the dull December morning appointed for her wedding.

The wind had blown a gale all night, and this was succeeded by a deep sea fog, so thick that it was almost impossible to see half the pier, while turning landwards you were greeted by a fine, drizzling rain, little enough to the eye watching it from the shelter of a house, but so steady and penetrating as to be most unpleasant to those exposed to it.

The wedding was to be at twelve, and a slight repast would be taken afterwards at Princess

House—this last arrangement being decidedly against Lord Carlyon's wish, but Iris had insisted on it.

"The people here have been kind enough, and they will like to say they once saw a real live countess in her wedding-dress," she said simply; "besides, we shan't be in the house half an hour, so you can't get bored."

She beamed on her lover such an arch smile that he capitulated at once.

"You haven't told me yet where we shall go for our honeymoon," he observed fondly.

"Oh, we needn't settle that yet; wait till we are in London, Dene," with a sudden expression of gravity. "Have you told your sister?"

"No," he said, shortly, "I haven't had an opportunity."

"You might have written."

"Fortune has stolen a march on me," he returned; "she moved some weeks ago, and has never troubled herself to send me her address."

"Had you quarrelled?"

"Not exactly;" he hesitated, then went on with a plunge. "My sister is terribly narrow-minded; she has been spoilt by poverty; years of small means and pinching seem to have made Fortune regard riches as a positive danger. I offered her a liberal allowance, but she refused it; she declared she wanted nothing but what she earned. I had meant her to share my prosperity, I think I was as glad of it for her sake as my own; I confess she bitterly disappointed me."

"Good women are always narrow," said Iris, who certainly did not belong to the class she criticised; "but you need not worry, Dene; your sister is sure to write to you if she wants anything."

It was to be a very quiet wedding; the bridegroom contributed neither friends nor relations. One or two of the guests from Princess House had been invited; a very pretty little girl of ten was Iris's only bridesmaid.

Mr. Belden gave his daughter away, and the lawyer who drew the marriage settlements—a task which had not been offered to Mr. Dover—completed the number of spectators. Only the bride's dress, of rich white satin, half veiled in lace, revealed to the outside world that this was a marriage of consequence.

It was the dress which had been purchased weeks before, when Iris expected Eric, and not Dene, to stand beside her at the altar. The late Earl had himself given his *fiancée* the costly lace which he found among the stores of the last Countess Carlyon.

Iris must have been destitute of superstition or she could not have worn that lace upon her wedding-day.

The small, unlovely church was empty when the first of the bridal party arrived; it had a curious damp feeling as though the humid atmosphere without had entered through the green baize doors. The clergyman was punctual to the moment; he was a stranger who chanced to be taking duty for the incumbent—a tall, thin young man, not very experienced in the matter of weddings, and far more nervous than either bride or groom.

Lord Carlyon stood pale and grave, making his responses at the right time, never hesitating or seeming confused; Iris made a perfect bride, if anything a little too confident; in fact, as the young clergyman told his mother later, the two might have been married a dozen times before from the perfect calm of their manner.

In the vestry Mr. Belden kissed his daughter with effusion, addressing her as Countess Carlyon, and after a few complimentary speeches from the witnesses, the Earl led his wife down the aisle to the waiting fly, and they drove back quietly to Princess House.

"I hope you will be happy, my darling," said Dene, as he pressed the hand which lay in his own.

"I shall be as happy as a queen," replied Iris; "you and I will go abroad, Dene, and forget all that has happened in the last few months. Do you know I think you must find Carlyon Court as dreary as I did; you can't tell how you have altered. It seems to me you look years older than you did when I first knew you."

"And that is not much more than four months ago," he said slowly.

Mrs. Barry was waiting in the hall to receive them; a select few of the inmates were gathered in the large coffee-room. The regular repast was not till half-past one, so Mrs. Barry had fondly hoped only those specially asked to attend Lady Carlyon's wedding breakfast would be there; unfortunately the weather, or some other reason, kept everyone indoors, and they all filed into the coffee-room just as though they believed this was the regular public lunch served an hour too soon.

Mrs. Barry was greatly annoyed, but did not see her way to turn out the intruders; after all, some of them had lived years with her, while Lady Carlyon was but a new comer.

The countess, hurriedly consulted in an undertone, at once set the point at rest.

"What does it matter?" she asked cheerfully, "we shall be gone in half an hour."

Happily Mrs. Barry had prepared a special table for the wedding-party, formed by joining another to the little one at which the Belvideres usually sat. This was just as well, for assuredly, had she taken any of the "places" of the malcontent boarders there would have been a fuss.

And things were not very pleasant even as it was; the few specially invited were graciousness itself. Those who had, so to say, stormed the citadel and forced an entrance, were decidedly in a bad humour, and talking at the top of their voices managed for a few of their comments to reach even that special table where sat the bridal pair. Mr. Denis, the lawyer from London, had risen to propose the health of Lord and Lady Carlyon, when a malicious spinster, at what Iris called the "waif and stray" table, contrived to upset a heavy glass jug of water; the jug fell to the ground with a crash which sounded fairly terrible in the silence which had followed Mr. Denis's speech, every one standing with uplifted glasses ready to honour the toast. Of course the sensation lasted only a moment. A servant promptly mopped up the water and removed the fragments of broken glass. The commotion subsided, the health of the bridal pair was drunk in all due form, but somehow the incident had damped the feelings of those gathered round the special table. Iris was thankful when Mrs. Barry whispered it was time for her to change her dress. She tried not to hear Miss Smart's remark to her next-door neighbour as the bride passed them, "That for her part she saw nothing to make a fuss about in Lord Carlyon's getting married. The proof of the pudding was in the eating, and pride often had a fall."

Mrs. Barry helped the bride to change her dress, the skilful Elizabeth packed it rapidly, and in the space of ten minutes Lady Carlyon was in the hall taking leave of her father and friends. As she stepped into the fly the rain was coming down in torrents, while the darkness of the morning had deepened, the sky being one dreary leaden hue, without the slightest break in its thick mist.

"Ugh!" said Miss Smart, as she headed the retreat to the drawing-room, hoping to secure the special armchair close to the fire, which was in winter the great ambition of the ladies at Princess House. "Ugh! that marriage'll turn out wrong. No good ever came of a wedding when the sun didn't shine on the bride."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FORTUNE LANGLEY believed she did simply her duty in sending Paul Hardy away from her, feeling as she did morally certain that not accident but her brother Dene's hand had sent poor Eric to his last account, it seemed to the girl she ought not to marry Paul, and so, risk bringing on him in the future a share of Dene's shame.

It was a terrible mistake, one moreover destined to well nigh wreck their lives, but it was made in a divine unselfishness of which few women would be capable.

To tell Paul her suspicions seemed to the girl treachery against her brother. To marry him and keep such a secret from him was simply im-

possible; besides, Fortune Langley, though neither narrow minded or superstitious, had been brought up in the simple old-fashioned faith which believes firmly good will be rewarded and evil punished. Screen Dene as she might, a voice within seemed to tell her the truth would be discovered some day, and then—could she let Paul Hardy's rising fame be blighted by the world knowing he was the brother-in-law of a murderer? She felt certain she had done right, she told herself so a dozen times a day. She did not regret her course, but the reflection it was the only right one brought her no comfort. She got up each morning with a yearning sense of misery, she went through the day like a creature in a dream, hardly conscious of what went on around her, at night she never closed her eyes, she used to lay awake listening for the striking of a neighbouring clock, and counting the hours till morning, though poor girl morning only meant the beginning of another day of weariness.

Christie Seymour watched her friend closely, and decided the struggle could not go on. Fortune must either give way and pour out to some one the secret which was well nigh crushing her beneath its weight, or die. Health would fail, and a long illness would break down this awful strong self-control.

Just a week after Paul's visit she went into her friend's dreary room with a smile on her face, and a fixed purpose in her mind.

"Fortune I want to talk to you. I have something wonderful to tell you about myself, do rouse up dear and listen."

It was sad to see the girl's effort, she turned her beautiful eyes listlessly towards her friend; she tried to seem interested, but it was a dreary failure.

"Have you any new pupils, Christie?"

"No, and what is more I am never going to have any pupils again. It was settled last week, only you were so troubled I could not bother you with my affairs. I have sold the 'goodwill' of my connexion and introduced my successor, positively Fortune I gave my last lesson yesterday."

Fortune looked bewildered, Christie had succeeded in surprising her at last.

"Are you going to be married?" she asked.

"No, try again."

"But I can't, if you have given up teaching, how will you live?"

"I have come into some money dear, it's the most extraordinary story; it happened when you were away, but things were only settled last week. My father died when I was very small, and mother never could tell why he had insisted on my being called Christine. Very soon after you went to Norfolk I had a letter signed Christine Daryl, inviting me to call on the writer at a house in Streatham. She said she had been an old friend of my father's. I hesitated a little, but I'm glad now I went. Miss Daryl was a beautiful old lady with silvery hair. She was engaged to my father when she was a girl, but her mother, who didn't want her to be married at all, contrived to part them by some treachery. She did not tell me the particulars, but I know that each thought the other false. Miss Daryl was twenty-nine when she discovered the truth. She went to see my father; he was an artist, so, you see, she could go without its seeming odd, for ladies used to call on him about their pictures—Fortune, when she got there he told her he was to be married the next day. He had never forgotten her, but he was so lonely."

Fortune pressed her friend's hand.

"And you were called Christine after Miss Daryl?"

"Yes. She was very rich, and had no one very near her. She told me she had more money than she could spend. She meant to leave legacies to her favourite charities, but she wanted to feel sure her old lover's child was provided for. There was a pretty cottage in Kent, where my father once stayed one summer with her family; she meant to leave me that and five thousand pounds."

"You deserve it all," said Fortune. "You are the best woman I ever knew."

"Miss Daryl died very soon after I was with

her," went on Christie, "but her lawyer wrote and told me of the bequest, and last week he came to see me and said I could take possession when I pleased. The money is invested in stock, and brings in two hundred a year."

"I am so glad for you, dear;" and, indeed, the first ray of brightness crossed her face that Christie had seen there since her return from Norfolk.

"Fortune, I want to go to my new home, but I shall stay here unless I take you with me, dear. I don't ask what your trouble is—I won't try and force your confidence; but, indeed, indeed, the life you lead now is simply killing you. Come away with me to a new home, where everything doesn't remind you of all you have lost. You shall go on with your copying if you like; if you are so desperately proud you won't be my guest, you shall even pay me for your board—but come you must."

Fortune roused herself by an effort. For one moment the old soul and intellect flashed out of her lovely eyes; then it faded, and it was with a feeble, troubled expression she said,—

"I can't think, I feel past it; but you are the only friend I have left, Christie, and if you want me with you I will come."

"Have you any work to send back?" asked Miss Seymour practically; "is there anything to keep you from going away at once?"

"Nothing; I have not touched a pen since I came back. I cannot trust myself even to do the simplest piece of copying; it is just as though my mind were going, Christie."

Miss Seymour bent and kissed her. Often in the days that were gone she had felt ready to envy Fortune, because she was a good man's chosen wife; but now she realised dimly that love had brought her friend bitter pain instead of pleasure, and that if she herself had missed the joy of being first with another human creature, she had also missed the agony of such a disappointment as Fortune's.

"We will go away to-morrow, dear," she said gently, almost in the tone a mother would use to a sick child. "You must tell Mrs. Cox you are leaving her, and then if we both pay a week's rent instead of notice, we can go at any time."

"And," Fortune clung to her friend with a pitiful entreaty. "You won't leave any address. You will let us be hidden from everyone?"

Mrs. Cox made no difficulty. Truth to say she had been terribly alarmed lest Miss Langley should have a long illness, and become a burden on her hands.

"For it's plain to see, miss," the good woman told Christie, "the Earl will do nothing for her, seeing he's not written one line since she came back, and her doing no work all this time she can't have much put by."

It was a natural speech, but it grated on Christie painfully, and she felt more thankful than ever she was able to give her friend a home far away from that dreary house in Guilford-street, which was so mixed up in the girl's memory with painful association.

Brook Cottage was in Kent, some thirty miles from London and five from a town or railway station. It was furnished throughout in the style of long ago. No doubt in Miss Daryl's young days it had been called "old fashioned," but now it was perfect to the eyes educated to admire old oak and Chippendale furniture.

The drawing-room was sweet with lavender and pot-pourri; the faded blue of the damask seemed just to suit the spindle-legged tables and chairs. It was a pretty room, but there was nothing of warmth or life about it; "a room to dream in," thought Christie, "not fit for the rush and bustle of this hurrying everyday life."

The drawing-room and the best bedrooms seemed a little house by themselves. A long narrow dining-room or hall alone connected them with the other part of the house, which contained a cosy little work-room, very good kitchens, and a couple of servants' bedrooms.

Brook Cottage boasted a large garden, only separated from Danemore Park by a narrow lane. The brook which gave the little house its name flowed merrily at the bottom of the garden, and here Fortune Langley used to linger and listen to the rippling music of the stream.

Christie watched her anxiously for some days; then hope revived, there came a faint colour into the thin cheeks; a bright light into the sweet, true eyes. And, at last, one mild autumn evening, when they stood together watching the sun sink beneath the splendid trees of Danemoor Park, Fortune turned to her friend, with a grateful caress,—

"You have saved me, Christie!"

Christie did not ask "how?" or "from what?" She put one arm round the younger girl's waist, fondly, and waited for her to go on.

"It all seemed so black and dark," said Fortune, wistfully. "You know I had lost Paul, and it seemed to me life was not worth the living. I did not think—I could not—it seemed to make me almost mad. I felt like a rudderless barque that had lost its moorings, but I know now it was cowardly—life must go on even when all one's hopes are blighted."

Then Christie spoke,—

"Love isn't all, Fortune," she said, tenderly. "Life holds something for us still, even if we have missed the best gift of all."

Fortune clasped her hand.

"Yes; I shall get to work again now, but I owe all to you, Christie, that I am not a miserable wreck."

"You could have your copying sent by post," suggested Christie; "or you might even go up to London once a week. There's an omnibus runs to and from the station."

"I don't mean to go on copying," said Fortune, slowly; "I—I couldn't. I must find something else; and, till I can find that, I know you'll let me stay with you."

"I ask nothing better than to keep you at Brook Cottage, dear; only it will be dull for you when you are better, but you mustn't leave me till you are quite strong."

After that Fortune grew brighter, and more like her old self. Every day seemed to show an improvement in her, and when such few neighbours as Danemoor could muster seemed anxious to make the acquaintance of the two friends she did not hold back, but accepted the advances as frankly as they were made.

Danemoor Park was the property of General Markham. He and his wife—a childless pair—had been Miss Daryl's close friends, and, perhaps for this reason, they sought out her namesake. The clergyman and the doctor made up the visitors within walking distance, and by Christmas Fortune and Christie felt quite at home in the peaceful village.

No news reached them of Paul Hardy, except that Fortune saw his book advertised and at once ordered a copy, which she read alone, and did not even show to Christie.

Of Dene's wedding they never even heard; for Fortune had not sent Mr. Dover her address, and no one else was likely to tell her of it.

Mrs. Markham insisted on the two girls spending their Christmas at the park; in fact she refused to take 'No' when she brought her invitation.

"You are both far too young to live alone," said the kind old lady; "but, since your doing so has brought you into our village, I will forgive that; but leave you alone on Christmas Day I can't and won't. Why the General wouldn't enjoy his plum-pudding if he thought of you two girls here by yourselves."

Christie blushed furiously,—

"Indeed, Mrs. Markham, we had better stay at home. You may be having a large party for Christmas, and—"

"No one who won't be pleased to see you," interrupted her would-be hostess.

"I don't think you know," said Christie. "I was just a dancing mistress when Miss Daryl found me out and left me a house and income. Don't you understand, Mrs. Markham, some of your guests may be the parents of my pupils? Now do you think they would like to meet their children's dancing mistress?"

"My friends are not snobs," replied Mrs. Markham. "They would honour you as I do, for fighting bravely in adversity. Was Miss Langley a dancing mistress, too?"

"A law copyist," said Fortune, with a smile.

"That's a step lower down still, isn't it?"

"I don't care about steps," retorted Mrs. Markham. "I shall go home and tell the General you are coming."

"Do you mind?" asked Christie of her friend when the lively old lady had departed.

"No; I shall meet anyone I ever saw before, and I want to see you take your place in society as a landed proprietress."

Christie laughed heartily at the idea. They went to the park on Christmas Eve, a large party of guests were in the drawing-room when the girls entered dressed for dinner in soft flowing dresses of black tulle, Christie having ribbons of bright heliotrope for her ornaments, while Fortune had nothing to break the dusky outline, save a knot of white chrysanthemums at her breast. Many eyes were levelled at the two, they were so unlike the run of "country neighbours" invited to big houses out of charity, and a tall young man came forward with outstretched hand.

"Miss Seymour, is it possible?"

"Quite," returned Christie, calmly, "I am living in this neighbourhood, Captain Fane, but I certainly did not expect to meet you."

"The General is my godfather," he said, smiling, "and I am more at home in this house than any other. I shall ask Mrs. Markham to let me take you into dinner."

"Please don't."

"But the old lady had already made that very arrangement, so Aylmer had his own way in spite of Christie's objections. They did not talk much during the long repast, but Captain Fane soon followed the ladies to the drawing-room, and there he asked Mrs. Markham to let him show Miss Seymour the conservatory."

"Some other time," objected Christie.

"No, come now. Mrs. Markham will think I have offended you if you refuse."

So they moved off together, and in a few minutes reached the beautiful conservatory where Aylmer placed a seat for his companion near a fountain, and asked gravely,—

"Don't you think you have treated me very badly?"

"Not in the least."

"You met me at Eastbourne last August. We stayed in the same house for nearly a month, and you never seemed to find my company distasteful, then without a word of warning you disappeared."

"I paid my pension bill. I didn't decamp without telling my hostess. I wasn't bound to say good-bye to all the other boarders."

"And you only thought of me as one of the boarders?"

"Well," with a very dawning smile, "you weren't two of them."

"Christie," cried Aylmer Fane, fairly exasperated. "I won't put up with this. You knew perfectly I was only seeking an opportunity to ask you to be my wife. You had given me every reason to think you would accept me, and then—you suddenly vanished."

"Well?"

"Do you call that fair play?"

"Not as you put it; but I was deceived myself. I never thought you were anything but just a plain captain in the army."

"I am quite sure I never deceived you," said Aylmer rather mystified, "and I certainly am a captain in the army. A plain captain, if you prefer that rather unkind adjective."

"Of course if you turn everything into jest I can't explain."

"I am not jesting. It is far too serious a matter for me," said Aylmer, earnestly. "I have been looking for you ever since you left Eastbourne, and I never found the least clue to guide me. I was getting fairly desperate, when lo, you suddenly walked into the drawing-room."

"I have been at Danemoor two months; an old lady left me a little cottage in the village and just enough to live on."

"Very good of the old lady; but no reason for your doing your best to break my heart."

"I didn't."

"Christie, answer me one question. Why did you leave Eastbourne in such a hurry, and what do you mean by saying I deceived you?"

"That's two questions," objected Christie.

"I left Eastbourne because I thought you were going to—to—"

"To propose to you—so I was."

"And as I had found out you were not plain Captain Fane, but Lord Fane's nephew and heir, I had made up my mind to say 'No.'"

"Why?"

"If you must have it because I am very proud. I thought your illustrious relations might object to your marrying a dancing mistress, and I did not want to be your ruin."

"You were a very foolish child not to tell me what you had heard and ask me to explain, but it is not too late now. I am Lord Fane's nephew, and very probably I may some day have a right to claim his title; but as all the property, except a very small remnant, goes to his daughter, I shall be the poorest peer ever known, in fact, very likely I shall be too poor to assume the title. I don't believe my uncle will object to my choice of a wife. He is a dear old man, and an ardent match-maker. For years his great wish was that I should marry his only child, and so unite the title and estates."

"And why didn't you?"

"Well, I didn't like Hildred except as a cousin, and she perfectly detests me. She calls me a prig!"

"Oh!"

"And this morning I had a letter from her father announcing Hildred's engagement to some one else, so really, Christie, I don't think my cousin's existence need prejudice you against me."

"It's not only that?"

"Do you mean the dancing is an obstacle? I shouldn't like you to go on giving dancing lessons; but then I should object equally to my wife doing anything for money. I'm a jealous beggar, Christie, and I should prefer Mrs. Fane to exist on bread and cheese provided by myself to her enjoying any amount of delicacies gained by her own exertions. Now, my dear little girl, have I said enough to dispel your fancies. You know I love you. I've tried hard enough to find you all these weeks, and I think you may trust me to do what man can do to make you happy."

"And I thought no one would ever care for me," murmured Christie to herself.

"That was a slight mistake, dear. Now, will you let me tell Mrs. Markham and my godfather you and I have arranged to become one?"

"But—there's Fortune!"

Captain Fane started.

"Who is Fortune? That pretty girl who came with you to-night?"

"Yes, Aylmer, she is all alone in the world. You won't want me to give her up. She's the closest friend I have."

"Perhaps she'll adopt me as another friend," said Aylmer, gravely. "No, dear, I'll not ask you to give her up. If ever you and I are rich enough to carry out those plans we used to talk of at Eastbourne, we should have plenty of work for her in helping us to carry them out. What is her name besides Fortune?"

"Langley. She is Lord Carlyon's sister."

"Oh!"

"What does that 'oh!' mean, sir? Have you ever met the Earl? I knew him well when he was a clerk at two pounds a week, and I detested him. He seemed to me the most selfish cowardly creature I ever met. Fortune clung to him through everything when he was poor, she left him directly he became rich."

"Ah! No, I've never seen the Earl, Christie; but George Armstrong, a great chum of mine, is his agent in Norfolk. When Armstrong heard of the Earl's marriage he nearly threw up his post he was so angry."

"There must be some mistake. Carlyon isn't married. He would have told Fortune."

"He was married the beginning of this month. The bride was a Miss Belden. She was engaged to the late Lord Carlyon, and people seem to regard it as a scandal she should have married his cousin in less than three months after his death."

"Then Fortune met her at Carlyon," said Christie; "but I don't think she liked her. Fortune was at the Court all through that awful time of the Earl's death and the inquest. The shock changed her terribly. She is only just getting over it."



FORTUNE STOOD LINGERING AND LISTENING TO THE RIPPLING MUSIC OF THE STREAM.

The two young people returned to the drawing-room in time for coffee, and Aylmer must have found a chance to explain things to Mrs. Markham, for when Chrissie was safe in the shelter of her own room that night the dear old lady came in to wish her joy.

"I have known Aylmer Fane, boy and man, for twenty years, and I am sure you may trust him with all your heart. He's not rich, but he has enough to keep a wife quietly, and I think his uncle is sure to do something for him."

Chrissie raised her face appealingly to the old lady's.

"You don't think *this*" (meaning the engagement) "can hurt Aylmer. I love him dearly, but I'd rather break off things now than be the cause of an estrangement between him and his own people."

"My dear child, you need not be afraid. Lord and Lady Fane are the kindest people, if Aylmer had become engaged a year ago they might have had regrets, for it is an open secret they hoped he would marry their daughter, but now that Miss Hildred has accepted someone else, there can be no objection to Aylmer's doing the same."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"What Hildred Fane? Yes, lots of times; she would never have got on with Aylmer, they are both too dictatorial, she called him a prig and he always declared she was as bad, that nothing but a romantic love affair would make her endurable."

Chrissie drew a sigh of relief.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Markham, "I assure you you need never think Aylmer cared at all for Hildred, I never heard of his having even the slightest fancy for anyone until last summer. I will confess his description of the Miss Seymour he had lost, reminded me so strongly of the one I had found at Brook Cottage that I made up my mind you should meet here, but I would not say a word to him before you arrived for fear of raising false hopes."

She said good-night, Chrissie rested her head on her two hands in an ecstasy of happiness.

She had so craved for love, and lo! love was bliss. The only man she had ever admired and trusted with all her heart had chosen her out of all the world to be his own. But how was she to tell Fortune. How speak of her own happiness when the ashes of her friend's hopes were dead and cold. One thing came on her like a flash of lightning as she waited. Paul Hardy was secretary to a Lord Fane, Aylmer's uncle was Lord Fane, these two must be one and the same. Hildred Fane must have been thrown into constant intercourse with Paul, hearts were caught sometimes on the rebound. What if — but no the bare idea was too terrible, and pushing it hastily away Chrissie opened the door by which their rooms communicated, and went in search of Fortune.

She found the girl sitting by the still unshuttered window, looking out on to the pure brightness of the starlit sky. There was a new beauty it seemed to Chrissie in the sweet sad face. She felt dimly that sorrow and trouble had only raised Fortune higher.

"You need not tell me," said Fortune, putting her arms round her friend and kissing her. "I saw it all in your face when you came out of the conservatory with Captain Fane."

"Fortune I feel almost like a traitress for being happy while you are miserable."

"Why! I did not feel a traitress to you when I had Paul. Chrissie, I am as glad as any one can be for you. Love is just the most beautiful thing in the world, and it is sad for those it passes by, I am thankful it has come to you."

"And, Fortune, do you know—Dene is married, his wedding was this month."

"And his wife is Iris Belden!"

"Yes."

A long silence. Chrissie felt frightened.

"You did not like her, it is hard on you."

"I am sorry for Dene. But this marriage sets me free. While my brother was alone I shrank from taking up any fresh work in case he needed me. Now my mind is made up. When

you are married, Chrissie, I shall go away and be trained for a nurse."

"Don't," broke from Miss Seymour impulsively. "You'll be years and years in a hospital, and the loneliness will be so dreadful."

"Oh," said Fortune, almost gaily, "I don't aspire to be a grand certificated staff nurse, there are training homes where one can go for three or six months, just to learn one's work, and then one can settle down in some quiet country place as village nurse. I couldn't live always in a hospital. I think the huge wards and the crowds of doctors would terrify me, but to have a little cottage home of my own, and go about day after day among those who are sick and sorrowful would be very different."

"I should hate it," confessed Chrissie frankly, "but there, you are almost an angel, so perhaps it may suit you."

She went back to her own room to dream of her lover, her last waking thought a fixed resolve to find out from Aylmer the name of Hildred Fane's fiancé, and her last conscious wish a hope it might not prove to be Paul Hardy.

(To be continued.)

ONE hears a great deal lately of silver in India. That metal is used exclusively for money in that country. If gold were coined, the people would hoard it, and it would have no circulation. They make all their gold into jewellery, accumulating their savings in that shape. That is the reason why there are more goldsmiths than blacksmiths in India.

PRINCE RUPERT'S drop is the most curious wonder of the glassmaker's art. These are simply the drippings on molten glass, their curious properties being the result of their being suddenly glazed. One of these "drops" can be smartly ammered upon the larger end without causing a fracture, but if the smaller end has but the slightest atom clipped from its surface the whole object instantly bursts.



"WHY, DOUGLAS, WHAT A FUSS ABOUT NOTHING!" SAID SUSY, IN HER LIGHTEST MANNER.

LOVE IN A MAZE.

—:—

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN OLD MAID'S VICTORY.

VERILY love must be a wondrous strange passion—a curious merry freak of nature amounting almost to a curse—since it has ever the power to cloud the intelligence, the sanity, of two ordinarily intelligent and sane human beings!

With Rudolf's assistance Elizabeth Dawson stepped forthwith into the flat old boat and sat down upon the damp well of it, tucking her little feet out of the puddles as best she could.

Then Rudolf promptly loosened the chain; and, hoisting the pole, he with two or three swift, practised strokes shot the punt vigorously well out into the middle of the pond. This done, and they drifting smoothly, imperceptibly, as on a moonlit dream pond, he seated himself by Aunt Betty's side and placed his strong arm securely around her.

Then, so to speak, Aunt Betty dashed at conversation.

"I feel like the Lady of Shalott," said she "floating down—to down to—oh, I cannot," with a little low broken laugh which distinctly betrayed her mental perturbation, "recollect at this moment where it was she floated to! Of course, though, it rhymed with Shalott."

"To 'many-tower'd Camelot.' Only Lancelot is with you, my beautiful living Lady of Shalott!" Rudolf said, his lips now close to the tiny diamond burning in her ear. "He is not waiting for you—thank heaven!—as you come slowly gliding down the river, dead, white, heart-broken, by the gay barge-stairs of Camelot. He is with you in the flesh, hopeful and determined! Betty, I can no longer bear my life without you—yes, it has come to that!"

"Has it, Rudolf?"

"My darling, I have been cruel—cold and cruel. Let me explain—may I!"

"Ah, do!" sighed she; a long restful sigh of immeasurable content as he drew down her head to his shoulder and looked searchingly into her upraised eyes. As he did so, the fleecy white hood slipped from her hair and bared to the night-breeze the soft grey curls with the diamond star flaming amid them. To anyone then upon the bank of the fish-pond that star must have looked like a fire-fly or the tip of a fairy's wand flitting and hovering above the smooth dark water.

Rudolf laid a hand upon those pretty grey rings of hair, stroked them with reverent touch, saying:

"You must give me one; and I will have a locket made on purpose for it."

In her turn Aunt Betty lifted a quick nervous hand and gently yet forcibly removed Rudolf's caressing fingers from her roughened crown, and held them firmly in her lap. She could permit no lover's trifling in that delicate quarter.

"No, no, no," whispered she; "you would soon cease to value it if you had it!"

And she hastily drew the white wrap over her curls again, forehead and all, until only two shining eyes and the tip of a dainty nose were left visible—so making to vanish suddenly the flitting fire-fly above the calm black water.

"Not value it!" echoed Rudolf incredulously.

"Well, after a little while I dare say not," said she demurely. "People seldom do, you know. But"—with an accent of reproach—"were you not going to tell me why you have been so cold, and so unkind, and so cruel? Oh, you cannot deny it! The Rudolf de Vere who went to Rathdonnell was not, emphatically not, the Rudolf De Vere who returned to Monkshood a month ago. Come, tell me now!—how was it?"

"I was a coward, Betty,—afraid of the world's opinion, the world's ridicule," he answered dreamily. "Yet, first of all, let me hear straight from your own dear lips that I am not mistaken. You do care for me, Betty, do you not?"

"Should I be out here with you alone now,

Rudolf, if the case were otherwise!" she said, with sweet sobriety. "I think not."

"Yes," he went on, still thoughtfully, drawing her more securely to him and kissing the top of the fleecy white hood, since her drooping head quite prevented there being anything else to kiss; "I believe now that I must have loved you on that day we met on board the *Marie-Louise*. Do you remember?"

"Is it likely that I can ever forget! What have you not done for us—how much we owe to you! How lonely and forlorn should we have been without you! Ah, you have been a good and true friend to us, Rudolf," Elizabeth Dawson said, earnestly.

"And—Heaven hear me!—come what may, in me you shall find a good and true husband, Betty," he made answer passionately. "Yes; well do I know now that I must have loved you on that day of our first meeting; and yet how often since that day have I struggled hard to forget you!—to stamp out as it were all memory and all image of you from my heart and brain! It has indeed been one long hard perpetual struggle, I think; and now I have given in; can hold out no longer; your love, Betty, is as the breath of life itself to me. Without it I am as nothing."

"It is then, Rudolf, as I have sometimes fancied," said Elizabeth Dawson, stroking slowly with tender fingers the predatory hand she had captured on her hair. "You were afraid the world would scoff and laugh at you for loving and wooing a woman so much older than yourself? Come, be candid with me!"

"It was so," he told her honestly. "I knew that the fact of my possessing something more than a liberal share of this world's goods—a share indeed which would suffice for the wants of half-a-dozen reasonable men—would save me from the stigma of 'fortune-hunter,' in the matter of my approaching you as a lover; but it could not, nor will it, you know, Betty, save me from the coarse jests and laughter of my fellow-men. But now that I am assured that you do

sincerely care for me, that you are able in full measure to return my own strong and deep affection, the opinion of the world, after all, seems but a puny affair, and my past cowardice appears detestable even in my own eyes! For your dear sake it would be easier to brave things much more terrible than the feather-brained gibes of a frivolous society. It is my creed now that no man of sense should care a rap for them. Behold, how I am changed! Am I not frank and blunt; almost brutally so—eh?" said Rudolf fondly.

"I like you to be; in the circumstances it is best," she answered, quietly. "Ah, yes, Rudolf, it is easy to guess what they will all say of us. 'The accomplished and fastidious Rudolf De Vere has been caught at last; and, by a woman old enough to be his mother!' They will say stupid and would-be witty things of you, dear; but of me they will give utterance to witticisms more intolerable still."

"They will not do so in my hearing though," said Rudolf, with a serenity which bespoke conviction.

"Lady Aurelian and the others who like her have married young husbands—they have all managed to live down the talk of the town," said Aunt Betty musingly, "and she was in her sixties. I am not so far on as that, Rudolf; am I?"

"If you were far on in your seventies, my darling, it would make no shadow of difference; I should love you just the same. I never really loved woman, either young or old, until I met you Betty."

"And so you tried to harden your heart against me, and could not! Oh, Rudolf, I am so glad!"

"Yes, my own beloved, I was fool enough to hope, ay, and to believe that my stay in Ireland would cure me; I meant it to cure me; but it was no good. Even there, night and day, you haunted me; and I came back to Monkshood more miserable than ever—absence was no remedy. And then—and then, Betty, I saw, I could not help seeing the folly of Colin Chestow; and— and—forgive me, because it is true, you know it is, you cannot disown it—your open flirtation with him; and I think I nearly hated you then as awfully as I hated poor Colin himself."

Contrite Aunt Betty clung to her lover's arm, and hid her pale face against his warm shoulder.

"I did it on purpose," said she, very low. "Part of my reason for so acting I have already confessed to you—I wished to punish Colin and his scheming mother—that foolish young man especially—I could see through both of them. The other part of my reason I will tell you now. Young Colin was a handy medium, and—and I wanted to make you jealous, Rudolf."

"You succeeded, certainly, in your aim, Betty," said Rudolf, mildly and forgivingly. "Never in all my life before have I suffered as I have been suffering during this bygone month. Well, thank Heaven, it is over now!"

"You did not show it, Rudolf."

"I did not mean to," said he. "Nevertheless, when I unearthed you and Colin this afternoon, boxed up there together in that solitary standing brougham in Rockstone Forest, I could have murdered you both," said Rudolf, cheerfully, "on the spot."

Aunt Betty laughed softly.

"He had just been proposing to me—the ridiculous boy!" she said.

"I guessed as much," said Rudolf, drily. "However, all's well that ends well; and the brougham incident just served to clinch my own determination. The jealous misery I was enduring should have an end in some form or other before I was many hours older. I swore it. I would learn my fate before quitting The Granary this night; and the morrow should see me either still in England, satisfied and victorious, or a wretched wanderer and exile far away out of it."

Thereupon he embraced her with passionate suddenness, and the punt lurched horribly. Aunt Betty uttered a muffled shriek of real terror, and clung desperately to Rudolf.

"We shall be over!" she gasped, "and it would be such a pity to drown ourselves in this deep, dark, dismal water, just when we understand each other so well and life is all of us

seems all so—so bright and beautiful—Oh, pray, pray be careful!" cried she, piteously.

Rudolf, the victorious lover, calmed her fears. "We would drown together, my darling, or we would swim safely to land together," said he.

Aunt Betty declared with severity that he was talking great nonsense—that either course would be dreadfully unpleasant, and with a little wisdom altogether unnecessary; and the next instant she had started guiltily, for the yard-clock at the home-farm struck one. Positively one o'clock in the morning!

"Do let us get back!" she cried, in a flurry. "We have been absent from the house too long. Yes, Rudolf—and there goes a carriage—listen! Some of them are leaving, and I ought to be there. Make haste—get the pole—and let us land directly."

He perceived that she was in earnest, and he at once obeyed her. A minute or so later he was lifting her from the punt, and they were retracing their steps contentedly by the way they had come—along the dim and dewy alleys of the ghostly old kitchen-garden. And the fish-pond behind them was left to its silence and its solitude again, until with the misty autumn dawn the timorous dabchicks should leave their sedge beds and go scudding "cluck-clucking" over the cold grey water, their dripping thin red legs trailing after them and wrinkling the veiled smooth face of the pond.

Yes, the night was passing away, for the moon was low in the sky; no longer riding high and serene above the dark woods, but now peeping palely through the stark black tree-trunks, like a wan and wistful face behind prison bars.

They were close to the house, but were lost in far-reaching shadow. They could hear the lively music of the band, and could see that the porch door was ajar. Soon it was flung wider, and two figures appeared together in the porch—the light from within flooding around them—to peer anxiously forth into the obscurity beyond.

Miss Dawson halted.

"See! They are Susy and Douglas, and are doubtless looking out for us," she whispered, quickly. "Yet one moment, Rudolf, before we go in. I have something to say."

Invisible to the watchers in the porch, she stood before Rudolf De Vere and detained him thus, with her two hands holding his. In the darkness she looked up at him fearlessly; and once more the borrowed fleecy white thing slipped from her crown, so baring again the soft grey hair and the flaming diamond star.

Instantly that star, though apparently afar, was seen and recognised by Douglas and Susy. Aunt Betty, evidently not alone, was safe, then, and near home; and, with this consolatory knowledge, the pair in the porch discreetly retired.

"Rudolf!" Aunt Betty said, "a clear understanding is always best, especially in a situation involving marriage and money matters. Susy and I are so thoroughly alone in the world—I mean as regards all kindred, alike near and distant—that it behoves me—becomes my duty, you see—to speak openly and frankly of these things. Rudolf, I will put it in plain, brief vernacular—I am no great catch; everything that we have here and in Santa Rosa Island belongs to Susy!"

Rudolf laughed, bent his handsome head, and kissed her.

"My dearest, what of that?" said he.

"You may have thought you were winning a wealthy wife, as well as an old one."

"Upon my honour, Betty, I never have thought a word about it," said Rudolf, lightly and truthfully; at any rate, truthfully in so far as the first half of her suggestion was concerned.

"Still," she persisted, "men love money; and the more they have, as often as not the more they covet. And, Rudolf, it is an ancient creed that wealth should wed wealth, you know."

"Is it? I didn't know! But I do know this, my dear one: Susy is welcome to all she's got, whatever it be. Why, Betty, how oddly suspicious you have grown, haven't you? Do you imagine that, after all, then, I am unable to give my wife the advantages and the position she should naturally expect of me by right? What has come over you, my darling? Good heavens! 'tis you I want—you alone, Betty—nothing else in the

world. What does it matter to me whether or not—"

She still detained him with her two hands grasping his; and now she leaned gently forward and pressed her forehead to his breast.

"It is well; say no more," she said. "Rudolf, dear love, I am content."

A short heavenly silence followed this admission.

Rudolf broke it.

"Ah, by-the-bye, Betty, I too have something more to tell you," he cried light-heartedly. "It has just occurred to me; I had nearly forgotten!"

"Yes, Rudolf?"

"Let me see—it was yesterday. No! to be accurate at this hour, it was the day before. You'll hardly believe it," Rudolf laughed; "but I had a sort of hostile encounter with old Dr. Gabriel Gaunt of Maydew village—met him accidentally at Tamar Payne's cottage."

"I saw you there. I rode past the cottage with Colin Chestow."

"Of course, I remember you did," said Rudolf, quizzically; "but never will you ride past it in like fashion again, madam."

"I have no wish to," she murmured, humbly. "And what did Dr. Gabriel Gaunt say? Was it—was it anything about me?"

"Yes. He spoke of you in a way I did not like, and I told him flatly that if he had been a younger man I should have knocked him down then and there."

"I wish you had—the old wretch!"

"The whole manner of the fossilised dandy was offensive in the extreme. I fancy, however, he was—well, tipsey; for he insinuated the most impossible things. In fact—ha, ha, ha!" laughed Rudolf again—"the old rogue denied your identity, Betty; swore that you were not the Elizabeth Dawson he used to know, and who went out with Oliver Dawson to Santa Rosa Island! What in the world could the old chap mean, eh?"

There was no answering laugh, however, upon the lips of Elizabeth Dawson—no responsive smile in her grave eyes.

"It shall by-and-by be proved to Dr. Gabriel Gaunt—ay, proved to him beyond all contradiction—that he is wrong, grossly deceived," she said, in a low firm voice.

"By-and-by, Betty! and, pray, when may that be?" said Rudolf, half playfully and incredulously, yet wondering a little perhaps within himself why Elizabeth Dawson should take in apparently so serious a spirit a matter which, after all, was not worthy of serious consideration, which could not possibly require any actual sober refutation—just the senile babble of an eccentric vain old person, whose eyesight was bleak with age, and whose memory was not to be trusted. "I should like to be a witness of the old fellow's discomfiture," smiled he.

"Then in all probability you will, Rudolf. For I think," said Elizabeth Dawson, solemnly, "that it will happen on our wedding-day."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MARCH OF EVENTS.

TIME sometimes rushes with us and sometimes crawls.

Within less than a week from the date of the picnic in Rockstone Forest and the subsequent dance at The Granary, events seemed to come crowding thick and fast, one upon the heels of another, into the lives of the chief personages who had assisted at Colin Chestow's birthday treat.

The two ladies from Santa Rosa Island had found husbands—that is, they were engaged to be married to the men of their choice. The pretty young niece, Susy Dawson, to the new author, Douglas Rex, whose name had so suddenly shot upward into fame. The charming and sprightly aunt, Elizabeth Dawson, to the rich and popular Rudolf De Vere, whom so many a woman heretofore had tried, yet tried in vain, to secure for herself.

The interesting news of this double engagement, which in all likelihood would end in a

double wedding, spread quickly enough throughout the land; for the society scribblers, as a matter of course, pounced upon the story and made it their own, and once more everybody who was anybody was talking of the two Misses Dawson.

If the tongues of the world wagged in merry malice over the extraordinary choice of Susy Dawson, they wagged yet more maliciously and unweariedly over the affair of Elizabeth Dawson and Rudolf de Vere—Rudolf whose tact and calm sense during the probation of his bachelorhood had been notorious in avoiding the matrimonial gins so constantly and so cleverly set for his destruction, and who was now so besottedly in love that he was about to marry a woman—a *passée* made-up creature who tricked herself out like a damsel of twenty, bitterly disappointed matrons said—"old enough to be his mother."

He had prophesied that a cynical and frivolous world would laugh at him; and laugh it did, affectedly holding its hollow sides, so to speak, with both hands.

But what cared Rudolf! Indeed, in his newly-found great happiness, in his supreme quiet content with the existing arrangement of affairs, he was astonished to find how little he actually cared for anything or for anybody, beyond himself and Aunt Betty, and the deep mutual pleasure they experienced in the society of each other.

He was alone at Monkshood now, and consequently every day at The Granary, except when Douglas Rex came down from town for a Saturday to Monday sojourn with his friend and to talk to Susy about the ever-increasing success of *The Pagan Bride*, and the new book which was progressing rapidly towards completion.

Lucky Douglas!—the dark despairing days of the past were now for ever over, would never more return; the future ahead of him was brilliant and assured. Fame he had already won; fortune was in his grasp. No longer, with sinking heart and diffident halting mien, did he seek the favour of the publishers; on the contrary, they with eagerness, with courtesy, indeed with much respect, now sought the notice of Mr. Douglas Rex! Capers!—as the Romans say—how times were changed!

At this date, when the sloping leaf-strewn gardens of The Granary and the wide brown fields around Maydew were alike hardening white with the first keen frosts of December, *The Pagan Bride* was in its cheap single-volume garb; and editions of the book, one after another, were being called for and sold off almost as quickly as printer and binder could get them ready for the trade. Every bookstall in the kingdom displayed the novel conspicuously, in square solid stacks nearly a yard high. In short, the story was a phenomenal success—one of those amazing "hits" in the literary scramble for a front place which may occur perhaps about once in a quarter of a century.

The latest news concerning *The Pagan Bride* which Douglas on one Saturday brought down to The Granary was that the story would shortly be dramatised by a well-known hand at the craft, and put before the world theatrically at one of the West-end leading playhouses. A splendid company was to be collected for the enterprise; for about the only perfect emotional actress in London—according to some people—had expressed a strong desire to "create" the part of Virginia. The famous actress was convinced that the character of the heroine would "suit her down to the ground."

And then came a certain memorable Saturday afternoon—the second week in December it was then—when Douglas Rex rushed over from Monkshood to seek an interview with Susy alone.

Of course there was nothing extraordinary in this proceeding; only, as a rule, Douglas waited until Sunday when he strolled over in company with Rudolf; but to-day his wild deep eyes were wilder and brighter than ever, his gaunt shoulders seemed higher and squarer, his hair and beard looked even longer and more ragged than they were wont to look at ordinary times.

Susy, though hardly expecting him, was fortunately by herself in the drawing-room; the

light from the heaped-up wood fire on the big broad hearth flickering upon the polished dark furniture and gleaming as in a vast mirror over the shining black floor.

"Douglas! You! Oh, I am so glad—but, dear, what is it?"

His agitated manner alarmed her; and she began to imagine directly all sorts of dire calamities. She led him to a seat near the fire, sat down beside him, and put her arm lovingly round his neck; for in the old despondent way he had leaned forward as he sat and covered his eyes with his hands.

"Douglas dear," she said gently, "tell me what the trouble is."

At first he answered.

"Dear," she was beginning again, "let me hear—" when, for reply, he took something from a pocket-book and dropped it into Susy's lap—something which looked at first like a crisp sheet of thinnest white paper, but which upon examination proved to be two separate Bank of England notes, each for one hundred pounds.

For a moment Susy's perplexity was intense and speechless; then the truth darted upon her, and she laughed softly and easily, though at the same time flushing warmly to the roots of her pretty hair.

"Why, Douglas, what a fuss about nothing! And so you have found out all about it, then!"

"Yes," he groaned. "A chance word or two dropped yesterday at Lynx and Lane's revealed the secret. I demanded an explanation. They at first refused to give it. But, ultimately, I got it all out of them. Oh, Susy!"

"Douglas, dear, there is nothing so very terrible in it, is there?" she said, soothingly. "We knew the book would be a success—from Rudolf de Vere we had heard how clever you were—and we also knew that what you wanted to quicken success was—was merely a little outside help and interest—they are wanted by everybody once or twice in a lifetime. Don't be angry."

She laughed again very sweetly and coaxingly.

"Oh, Douglas," said she, "you can't think what a bother we had on that day with your Messrs. Lynx and Lane! For a while they were obdurate—utterly so. They said what we wanted to do was a most irregular procedure, and the firm could never countenance such a thing, and a great deal more nonsense that I've forgotten. But when they understood that we were the ladies from Santa Rosa Island, and—and all the rest of it, don't you know," said Susy vaguely, "Aunt Betty had very little extra trouble in getting them to accede to our wishes. In fact, she suggested and managed and arranged everything throughout—even to dictating that wonderful note you received. And afterwards, what do you think, Douglas? she sent them a card for our 'Wednesday Supper—after the Theatre,' and, do you know, dear, I believe they did positively appear on one occasion—I dare say out of curiosity—but no one, I fancy, recognised them in the crowd."

"And, if my book had failed, I never should have been able to pay you back!" he almost sobbed.

"If your book had failed—and we knew that there was no possibility of failure," she told him earnestly—"the chances are, dear Douglas, you never would have heard a syllable concerning the transaction."

"And then there must be the additional expenses of publication!" cried he, aghast; suddenly recollecting further complexities.

"Well, they are all right now—or, at any rate, can soon be put right if they are not!" said Susy, cheerfully, with the easy logic of a young woman who has not a care or sorrow in the world. "Why fret over trifles, Douglas! There, see!"—with a business-like air, she re-folded Douglas's two bank-notes and placed them in her bosom. "Now you have paid us back; be happy. And you are every day becoming richer and more famous, remember! Oh, I certainly do think, Douglas, dear, that you have no just reason to complain!"

"But I thought, I blindly thought, that my own talents, my own unaided individual genius, had won the fight. It was a most cruel shock to discover that —"

He checked himself; and with a thrill of the nervous dramatic instinct that is strong, if latent, in every true artistic temperament under heaven, he rose unexpectedly and fell at Susy's feet; kissing passionately as he knelt there the lace hem of her tea-gown; the higher and more generous feelings within him triumphing over his transient discontent.

"Susy, sweet, forgive me! I am a brute—a mean, grumbling ungrateful brute. No poor words of mine can ever thank you fittingly for your angel goodness —"

She stroked lingeringly his thick rough hair, noting unconsciously how many were the silver threads in it.

"If thanks of any sort are anywhere due, Douglas," she said, seriously, bending over him and interrupting his passionate avowal, "I think they should fall to the share of Aunt Betty and Rudolf. They are full of resource and originality. I have none—neither one nor the other. I have done little enough, dear. For your sake, Douglas, I wish I were cleverer; for a clever man should have a clever wife. Ah me! I fear that you will be awfully disappointed when you come by-and-by to find out what a very commonplace little person is the woman you have married."

"I would not, for the kingdom of heaven," he cried extravagantly, in his wild, excitable way, "see a single hair of your dear head otherwise than it is! Oh, Susy—soul of me!—my own darling! what a saving boon has your love been to me!"

(To be continued.)

OLGA'S AFFLICTION.

—50—

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE was a little pause, and then the bandage was removed.

At first Neil seemed to see but dimly, but his lips slowly parted and he drew a long inward breath. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again, fixing them, as before, upon Olga's face.

Very slowly he withdrew his hand from Morgan and placed it on the back of her head, drawing her closer to him. His face flushed.

No one either spoke or moved, and the silence was almost painful.

He drew her closer, closer, and then his lips touched hers.

A little chill crept through her, but she neither moved nor stirred; she looked straight into his eyes. But somehow she knew that Morgan had grown white as death. One of Neil's arms was about her, the other hand she held. She heard his voice in a whisper reach her,—

"My wife! For the first time I see you!"

"Then he kissed her again—this time upon the brow—and a laugh that was decidedly hysterical escaped him. He turned quickly to Morgan, and rising from his chair, grasped the hand of his old friend.

"I see you, old man!" he cried. "You are, as I thought you were, the noblest, truest friend on earth!"

Morgan could not speak. If, instead of the sentence, Neil had put a knife into his heart, it would have hurt him less. He was crying out to himself of his own villainy, and he feared that his friend would read it in his countenance. He turned away with a little groan; but it seemed to Neil that it was only an excess of emotion, and in order to give Morgan time to recover himself, he gave his hand to Dr. Selby.

"What do I not owe you!" he exclaimed.

"I can tell you better what you do owe me, which is something over twenty guineas," laughed the doctor; "but there is one to whom your debt cannot be estimated."

"You mean Olga?"

"I do."

Stuart smiled, and putting out his hand, touched her bright hair gently.

"To whom should a man be indebted in that

way, doctor, if not to his wife?" he asked, quietly.

"His what?" queried the doctor, looking from one to the other in unaffected surprise, and even some dismay.

"To his wife," repeated Neil. "I promised her that I would say nothing of our marriage until after my sight was restored, unless the operation should prove unsuccessful."

The doctor looked at Olga. There was an expression of positive pity in his eyes too distinct not to be read; and then, fearing that Stuart might understand, he covered his dismay with a little laugh, and cried, in a more playful vein than he usually indulged,—

"I call that false pretences. Here I have been falling in love with her myself, and now I find that it is all to no purpose. Why, I was on the point of proposing! If I had, I should have sued you both."

His quick eye had travelled to Morgan, and did not fail to observe the awful greyness that had returned to his countenance. He felt that, in sympathy, he must cut the conversation short, and, with his usual bustle and brusqueness, he exclaimed,—

"Come, Stuart; is there anything special that you want to see? You know that bandage can only be left off for a few minutes at a time."

"Must it go on again?" he asked, almost piteously.

"To be sure. But I will grant you five minutes alone with—hang me, if I can bring myself to call her your wife! I don't like it."

He smiled as if to indicate that what he had said was not quite the truth, and put his hand upon Morgan's shoulder.

"Come with me!" he exclaimed, authoritatively.

Morgan did not hesitate to follow. On the contrary, it seemed to him the greatest relief that he had ever known when the door closed, shutting him out from the scene.

Doctor Selby did not speak until they were alone in the library at the foot of the stairs, then he placed his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"How is this?" he asked. "Is it really true that—she is his—wife?"

"It is really true," answered Morgan dully.

"But you—you! What do you think of it?" Morgan looked at him curiously.

"What do I think of it?" he questioned. "What right have I to think anything of it?"

The tone was haughty, but the doctor was too interested to mind that. It was in his most brusque tone that he cried out—

"But hang it all, man, you are in love with her yourself!"

Morgan started. Once again that guilty flush stole into his cheeks.

"Doctor Selby—" he began indignantly.

But the doctor interrupted by a wave of the hand.

"Don't take the trouble to deny it. I know. And the worst of it is that she is in love with you!"

"What are you thinking of?" demanded Morgan. "She thinks no more of me than the dirt beneath her feet."

"H'm!" ejaculated the doctor, using his favourite expression. "That is what we would both desire for her sake, doubtless; but, unfortunately, it is not true. What are you going to do about it?"

"Heaven help me, I don't know!" cried Morgan, passionately. "If what you say is true, which I pray Heaven it is not, then I shall go away, I suppose, where neither of them will ever be distressed with the sight of me again. What must you think of me, doctor? Heaven knows, your opinion cannot be lower than mine is of myself!"

Selby did not reply at once; he was thinking, Morgan, too, was silent for a little time; then he turned away with an expression of bitterness in his eyes, which Selby had rarely seen equalled.

"And the worst of it is," he groaned, "that I have grossly offended her, and shall have no opportunity to apologise!"

He stood by the window staring out, not knowing that the doctor had regarded him silently for a moment, and then quietly left the room.

With rather hesitating steps Selby mounted the stair and slowly entered Neil's room. He went up to his patient calmly, and in his usual tone exclaimed,—

"Time's up! You must go back to your blindness now for a little while, in order that you may see for all time by and bye."

Neil smiled. But it was not upon him that the eyes of the doctor were fixed. He was looking so earnestly at Olga that he even failed to hear what it was his patient had said in reply.

He noted her pallor: he even noted the expression of fear that was almost terror in her eyes, and a little sigh escaped the old fellow who had always been looked upon as too gruff and brusque for sympathy.

"My dear," he said to her, laying his hand kindly upon her shoulder, "I want to take this young man's temperature, and I have left my thermometer on the library table. Will you go down there and get it for me! You need not return just at once, as there are some things that I have to say to him."

He either saw or fancied he saw an expression of relief in her eyes, that she was to be released for even so short a time; then she arose hastily and left the room without a word.

The old doctor listened until he heard her little heels strike the marble flooring of the lower hall, then he turned again to Neil, rather too absently for the case that he had on hand.

Olga, meantime had reached the library, faint, half sick from the strain under which she had been placed. She leaned against the door for a moment before entering, then slowly opened it.

She had just stepped inside, when the suction from the window shut the door with a bang, and the man beside the window started and turned around.

He caught his breath with a little gasp. It seemed to him that every drop of blood in his body had rushed into his face; but she stood there white, trembling, appearing to hesitate between standing her ground and fleeing from his presence.

The moment that they stood like that seemed ages to them both, and then recovering himself after a masterful effort Morgan went up to her and took her hand.

His hand felt like a coal of fire against her icy fingers, but there was nothing of a demonstrative nature in the light grasp. It was as respectful as the hand-clasp of an utter stranger.

"Olga," he said gently, "I am glad that you have come. There is that which I feel that I must say to you, and the first thing is, I want to apologise most humbly for the mortal offence that I offered you—last night was it? It seems a year ago! It is the last request that I shall ever make of you, Olga, and I do it from the bottom of an anguished heart. Will you forgive me?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

OLGA did not reply. She was staring at Morgan as if she had not quite comprehended what it was that he had said to her. In her blue eyes he seemed to see more real agony than he had ever seen there under all her suffering before, and he observed that she was trembling.

He led her to a chair and gently placed her in it; then he stood by the desk at a respectful distance from her, and looked humbly at her.

"Is my offence, then, beyond pardon, Olga," he asked, wistfully. "Can you find no kind word to say to him who is going into exile for your sake?"

She put up her fingers and touched the scar on the place where his lips had rested. She seemed to feel the imprint of that kiss again; but she was still dazed, almost mentally helpless.

"I don't understand," she stammered. "Where are—where are you going? And why? It was his turn to look surprised."

"Heaven knows where!" he answered, miserably, after a little pause. "What difference can it make? It seems to me that one place is just as good, or just as bad, as another. There is no spot upon earth that is not perdition now!"

She arose slowly from the chair in which he

had placed her. She had grown even paler, and the scar seemed to stand out as it had never done before in all their acquaintance; yet now there was nothing ugly or repulsive to him in that face.

She laid her cold fingers upon his arm, and clutched him as if from him alone she could hope for strength.

"You have not said why!" she exclaimed, hoarsely.

He looked at her for a moment breathlessly, then he covered his eyes with his hand.

"Don't!" he whispered. "It is too much; I cannot bear it!"

"Don't go!" she whispered too, her voice unconsciously assuming the tone that his had done. "Don't go; Neil needs you."

He looked up and shook off her hand savagely. He took a step backward, and there was something almost resembling contempt in his voice as he said:

"You have less sympathy in your body than that inanimate table there. At least he has—you!"

She passed her hand wearily across her brow, then she sat down again in the chair that she had vacated. She hesitated for a moment then said, huskily:

"But you are Neil's friend!"

"And you are Neil's wife!" he cried fiercely. "You love him, and—"

"Wait!" she exclaimed heavily. "A few days ago I told you that your friendship was sweet to me, and you said that you had not given it to me. I told you that I did not believe you, and I did not. It was not true, was it? Oh, for Heaven's sake, tell me that it was not true! Tell me that you will be my friend—that you will advise me what is right and well to do—for there was never one so alone in all the world as I!"

He looked at her in absolute amazement. For a moment it even occurred to him that she was acting; but one look into that ghastly countenance was sufficient to dispel that.

It did not seem to him possible that she could have failed to understand the nature of that scene of the night before, and yet apparently she had. It bewildered, interested him.

He drew up a chair before her and sat down, leaning his arms upon his knees, and looking earnestly into her eyes.

"I don't think I exactly comprehend, Olga," he said to her, striving to calm his heart and speak naturally and quietly. "I remember telling you that I had no friendship to give you, and in the light of subsequent events, I think that I spoke nearer to truth than I then suspected; but I would give my life for you, just the same. I would give the soul out of my body if it would make you happy!"

"And is not that friendship?"

"No, it is not friendship. But we won't go into the analysis of sentiments now; there are other things that require the time. In what did you want my help, Olga?"

Her eyes clouded.

"It is so hard to tell you," she groaned—"it is so bitterly hard! And yet you are Neil's friend, and in spite of all that you have said, you are mine as well. To whom, then, should I apply, if not to you?"

He straightened himself a trifle, and his blue eyes grew almost black.

"Is it to tell me of your love for—"

"No, no," she interrupted, feverishly. "I wish it were! Heaven knows I do! I don't know what you will think of me; I don't know what you will say, but I must tell you. It seems to me that I will go mad if I do not. Do you remember our conversation down among the rocks that day at Ashleigh when we spoke of Neil?"

"The day when you told me how you loved him?"

Her white face flushed.

"Yes," she answered, humbly.

"I remember," he said, coldly.

But she did not seem to observe the coldness. The flush had not left her, and she leaned toward him earnestly, feverishly.

"You told me that it was not love," she continued, hoarsely. "You told me that it was his affliction that attracted me. You said that

was only the knowledge that he could not see me as I really am that attracted me. You told me that it was his blindness that I loved, not Neil Stuart."

He was leaning toward her again, breathless, eager. His eyes were fixed upon hers almost wildly.

"Yes!" he whispered.

"I did not believe you," she said, wretchedly. "I told you that it was not true."

"I remember that also. But now——"

"Heaven help me, it was true! I knew it the moment that I looked into his eyes with their restored sight. I knew that the penalty attached to my mad folly was eternal misery!"

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

For a moment Morgan looked at her. Once his arm went out, as if he would draw her to his heart and comfort her, as if his whole soul were being drowned in every tear that fell from her eyes; and then he folded his arms tightly across his chest and rose suddenly, walking rapidly up and down the floor.

He controlled himself while her tears continued to flow by putting the most rigid curb upon his passions; then when she had become more calm, he sat down before her again. The flush had left his brow and the ashen grey had taken its place once more.

"Olga," he said, forcing himself to speak quietly, "I would give the heart out of my body to help you, dear; but I can't."

"Then you do not despise me?"

"Despise you? I—— No, child; of course I do not. I think I understood from the first how all this was to end, without really realising that I did so. I seemed to see it as in a dream. I mean the part between you and Stuart. Heaven knows, I never dreamed of the part that I should play in it, or I should have gone to the other end of the earth, or drowned myself in the sea, to escape it. But I can't help you, dear. No one can. Stuart is your husband, and there is only Heaven between you and him!"

"You mean——"

"I mean that you must decide what your duty is, and act upon it."

"But you yourself spoke of the sacrament; you yourself have said that marriage was no marriage without love."

He flung out his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"For the love of Heaven, don't bring my own mad remarks against me! I have set myself up as a judge, and there has been no one in all this world so hideously mistaken as I!" he cried, passionately.

"Then you will not help me?"

"I can't—I can't! Do not ask me. You don't know the frightful temptation that you are putting before me, and, Heaven knows, I have proved myself weak enough! If you knew how I have cursed myself for my base treachery last night, you would pity me, and not ask it of me."

She looked at him for a little while like a bewildered child, and then she put out her hand to him helplessly.

"Is that what you asked my forgiveness for?" she asked, simply.

"Yes," he answered, pressing the hand she extended respectfully, and then dropping it as if he dared retain it no longer.

"I don't know why you should," she continued, in the same tone—"I don't know why you should. It only gave me strength and courage. I felt that you did not despise me—you, with your sight—you who could see my terrible deformity. I think that last night, after you had left me, and before I had realised that my—my love for—Neil was not what I had believed, was the happiest night that I have ever known in my whole life. I felt that you did not despise me, so why should he? And it seemed to me that I saw happiness dawning at last. And then—and then the knowledge came that it was I who had changed, and it almost killed me. Oh, it is too cruel—too——"

"Olga, for pity's sake, hush! I cannot bear everything, and you are maddening me. I am going. When I have my reason back, I am coming to say farewell to—to your husband. As you value your whole future life, say nothing to him

of this conversation to-day. I can't say good-bye to you now—my strength is not great enough. I will see you once more before we part for ever."

CHAPTER XXX.

He did not approach her; he did not even look at her. While he spoke he crossed the room and was now standing with his hand upon the knob of the door. He dared not trust himself to hear again the sound of her voice, and as he ceased speaking, he opened the door quickly and passed out.

He closed it behind him, and she was left there alone.

She sat there staring at the mute panels for a moment, then she put her head down upon the desk, as she had done sometimes when she was a little child at school, and sobbed as she had done since then.

She was perfectly sincere and honest in what she had said to Morgan. It never occurred to her that Morgan loved her. She knew that he was sorry for her. She believed that he liked her, and that he would have helped her if he could. She knew in her inner soul that that was not quite all; and yet she had too little confidence in herself, too little vanity to believe for a moment that he could care for her, conscious as he was of her terrible deformity.

Like a distressed child, she scarcely knew what it was that troubled her; and yet she knew that her heart ached with a poignancy that it had never known before.

"I have lost my friend, and I have lost my love!" she kept repeating to herself. "It was not Neil that I loved. It was his misfortune. It was the sympathy for one who had suffered a little of what I had suffered that drew me to him, and the moment that his eyes looked into mine, I realised it all. Oh! of what use am I in the world? Why can I not die now and end it all!"

There was the cry, the sorrow, the suffering there, but it was no longer, somehow, the hopeless anguish of the woman who had sat upon the rocks day after day at Ashleigh, and watched the sea. There was no longer despair in the grief. It hurt her perhaps even worse than it had hurt her before, but there was not that great laceration of the soul that had dulled and stupified the senses.

Of course she did not realise all that. In fact she understood very little of it, for the pain was real enough, and she did not stop to analyse it.

She was not aware that a man had entered the room, though her sobs had ceased, until she felt the pressure of a hand upon her head; then she heard the gruff, kindly voice of the doctor exclaim,—

"Is this the way you bring me my thermometer?"

She glanced up, surprised and ashamed.

"I—I forgot it," she stammered. "I—I beg your pardon!"

"It is granted, because the fact is that I found it in my pocket the moment that you were gone. Upon my soul, you have been crying! What about!"

"Nothing," she answered, inconsistently.

"I might have known it!" exclaimed the doctor, dryly. "That is what women usually cry for. What have you done with Morgan?"

"He has gone!"

"I have observed that fact without assistance," he said, drawing up the chair that Morgan had vacated. "But where has he gone?"

"I don't know," she replied, in a voice suspiciously faint.

"Oh, look here, little woman, there are very few people in this world to whom I have ever taken a violent fancy, but I have to you. I like you thoroughly. You believe that, don't you?"

"Yes; and I thank you."

"Never mind that; we don't want thanks for our affection; we want confidence. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"And between people who like each other, there

can be no impertinence. That is true also, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Well then don't you flare up and accuse me of impertinence when I ask you a question."

"I won't," answered Olga, smiling and colouring at the same time.

"What I want to ask you is this: What ever made you marry Stuart?"

She hesitated a moment. The colour deepened in her cheeks.

"I—I don't know," she stammered; then added quickly: "Yes, I do, too! I married him because I cared for him first, and because I did not wish him to lose the fortune that could be his only in the event of his marriage with me."

"Oh, I see. And you really were in love with him?"

"Certainly I was."

"H'm!" he ejaculated. "All right. It was only a little matter of curiosity on my part. By the way, my dear, there is another little matter that I have wanted to speak to you about, and have never had the courage. Now that your husband's sight has been restored, and you are so much in love with him—a little dryly—of course it is natural that you should want to—well, to look as well in his eyes as possible, is it not?"

"I don't think I quite understand what you mean."

"Every woman wants to look pretty to the man she loves, does she not?"

Her eyes filled with tears and dropped.

"I am quite aware that I can never be that to any man, doctor," she faltered.

"Well, I don't know about that," he answered, coolly. "You have not a bad feature in your face. Your form is perfect, your hair is exquisite, and one side of your face would have made Venus turn green with envy."

There was something in his manner of speaking that made her laugh; but it did not rob her voice of its bitterness as she replied:

"What you have said is, of course, an incalculable exaggeration, and yet I am quite aware that it is the very fact that the rest of me is not so bad that calls such glaring attention to my awful misfortune."

"Umph! umph! Let me look at it again."

He did not wait for her acquiescence, but took her face between his hands and turned her head to the light.

He examined the scar closely, minutely, even loosening her dress at the throat and drawing it down to where the scar ended.

He did not speak until the careful scrutiny was over, then in a quiet, half hesitating sort of way, he said:

"What would you give if I could plaster you up so that, with a high-neck gown, no one would ever know that there had been a scar upon your cheek?"

She started up. Her expression was beyond description. A scarlet flame shot from throat to brow. She did not seem to breathe, but was as rigid as a piece of coloured marble.

She sat like that, staring at him in that awful way for full thirty seconds, and then sunk back in her chair, pale, trembling, every nerve in her body seeming to quiver under the reaction.

"It was cruel," she murmured, faintly. "Hideously cruel."

She had closed her eyes as her head rested upon the back of her chair. Doctor Selby leaned over and took her hand kindly, tenderly.

"What is cruel?" he asked gently.

"To arouse a hope like that, even though it lasted but a minute, and even then I knew it to be so false."

"How do you know that, little woman?"

She opened her eyes again and looked at him.

She saw the earnestness of his expression, and once again she sat bolt upright and caught his hand in a grasp that almost hurt him.

"For pity's sake speak out!" she gasped.

"And if I told you there was a faint hope ever so slight, but still a hope——"

"I would crawl upon my knees to the ends of the earth for you. I would be your slave, your bond-servant, for the rest of my life. Oh, you can't understand it!—you can't understand what

I have suffered! To be pointed at; to see a shudder pass over every one who looks at me; to even see little dogs slink away from me as if the touch of my hand were a blow. What would I give? I would be willing to give my life if I could but look as others do when my upturned face gazed from its coffin."

Her excitement had grown with each word, and as she finished speaking she burst into a wild torrent of hysterical tears. Dr. Selby did not reply to her at once. He let her weep for a little while, and then he soothed her as he might have done a child.

He drew her head to his shoulder with fatherly interest, and pushed the hair back gently from her brow; then, when she was more quiet, he said tenderly:

"Mind, Olga, I promise nothing. I should have been more careful what I said to you. There is a part of the scar, a small part, but that which shows most, that can be almost entirely removed without any great danger; but the other part would require the most skilful operation, and might cost you your life. But the scar upon your cheek will only require a painful one, entirely without danger. You will risk yourself in my hands!"

"Yes, and ask Heaven's blessing upon you for the hope that you have given me, even if I die beneath it!"

"We hope it will not come to that, dear. There will always be a slight scar, mark you; but some of that woman's armour, a little powder, will cover that, I think. But you are to say nothing of it yet to anyone. Will you promise that?"

"I will promise anything that you ask no matter what it may be."

The old doctor smiled and touched his lips to her brow with the tenderness of a sympathetic father.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It seemed to Olga that that surely was the happiest day of all her life. She went about with a song upon her lips, and occasionally burst into little ripples of laughter that were somehow infectious, and more than once Neil found himself smiling without really knowing the reason why.

She sat beside him reading aloud later in the day, and as she lost the connection for the third or fourth time, he took the book from her hand and laid it upon a table.

"You are very absent-minded and nervous to-day, Olga," he said. "It is so unlike you. Why, dear?"

"Is it not the first day of your sight?" she asked, evasively.

"And that has made you happy?"

"Did you think I should not be glad for you, Neil?"

She felt that she had not been quite honest; but Doctor Selby held her pledged word to say nothing of the promise that he had made her.

"No," answered Neil. "I knew that you would be glad. It seems so strange to me, Olga, that I have really seen your face. Do you know, dear, that I absolutely forgot that which it has been my dream for years to look upon?"

"And that was—"

"Why, I think the greatest sorrow of my life has been that I could not see the colour of the sky, that I could not look at the city and the country as they are. I used to picture to myself what I should do the moment that my sight was restored to me, and it always seemed to me that I should fly to the window as a bird does who suddenly has his freedom restored. And yet I did nothing of the kind, Olga. I looked at you, dear, and I forgot all nature. I have forgotten even now the appearance of my oldest friend Morgan Adeson."

She had shrunk from him in a sort of embarrassment during his speech, and could find nothing to say when he paused; but he apparently did not observe it, for he went on after a little time:

"Do you know it is a strange thing now that I think of it, but as intimate as Adeson and I have been all our lives, I don't believe that any one

has ever told me how he looks, and I don't remember at all, the glimpse was so brief. You tell me, Olga. Is Adeson good looking?"

Her eyes sparkled; she straightened up and leaned back in her chair, folding her hands gracefully behind her head.

"More than that," she answered with unconscious warmth. "He is like one of those dissolute young gods that you have read of in mythology. He is tall and straight, formed like Apollo, yet with greater strength than he is supposed to have possessed. His hair is yellow, and in thick, clustering curls, and his eyes are a dark purple like wood violets. You must not form your opinion of men from a sight of Morgan Adeson, Neil, for I sometimes think that he is the most handsome man that I have ever seen."

"I wonder that you ever saw me, with him so near, Olga," he said musingly, but without jealousy. "I wonder that you did not fall in love with him."

She shrunk back from him, and the old whiteness overspread her countenance. She did not reply to him; she could not. It seemed to her as if her heart had suddenly risen in her throat and was about to choke her. She put out her hand again and took up the book which he had taken from her, but at the first words from it that left her lips he took it from her again.

"Don't read!" he exclaimed. "I don't feel like listening and you don't feel like reading. Let us talk. I am afraid that I offended you, and somehow I feel strangely unlike doing that to-day, Olga. There is such a curious feeling hovering over me. Once before in my life I had a presentiment. Do you remember it. I have another now, and it is not of happiness."

"You are nervous."

"I know; but it should be a nervous happiness, should it not? Let us talk of our future, Olga."

He could not see the horror that overspread her face, but her voice was not quite the same, though she strove to make it very brave as she said:

"What of it, Neil?"

He leaned forward, and taking her hand, stroked it gently.

"You have got over that old idea that we can be nothing to each other in the future, other than we have been, have you not? You are ready to be my wife in reality now, Olga, are you not?"

She hesitated a moment. It seemed to her that every element of her nature was in revulsion. She could no more have understood the strange change that had come over her than she could have accounted for the changing of the tides.

Then, after that brief pause, she summed all the bravery and self-sacrifice of her nature, and answered:

"I am ready to do as you wish, Neil!"

There was neither wild joy nor disappointment in his manner. He simply lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

She felt grateful to him that it was so, as if he had done her some inestimable favour, and her fingers pressed his gently.

"Thank you, dear," he said, quietly. "I shall always try to show you that I appreciate your sweet trust. Where shall we live, Olga? Have you thought of that?"

"No," she answered; "I have thought of nothing."

"But you prefer the country, do you not?"

"I don't know. There are so many things to happen before that is considered. Suppose we do not decide it at once; suppose we wait. There is no reason why it should be decided at once, is there, Neil?"

"No; we can leave it until by and by. I wish you would get some writing materials and sit here beside me while I write a note to my father and mother, Olga. I want to ask them to be here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. The bandage will be removed from my eyes again at that time, and I want them to be here. Then I shall introduce them to my wife. They will be surprised, Olga."

"And shocked!"

She said it without thinking, and his face flushed because he could not contradict her. It seemed to give him pain that he could not without uttering what she would know to be false;

so he took her hand and drew her down beside him, and kissed her upon the cheek.

"We shall be very happy together in spite of all the world, my wife and I," he said, gently.

The tears came to her eyes. It seemed to her so pitiful a thing that they should be striving to deceive each other in that style, they two whose whole future happiness was at stake; yet now less than ever would she have told him the truth of the change that had come to her.

It was with almost passionate relief that she bid him good-night that evening, knowing that, for the first time she would not be called during the night, but that she would at least have those long, sweet hours alone.

She went to her room, and forgot Neil Stuart in the memory of the words that Doctor Selby had spoken to her; forgot everything in the knowledge that she would look like others; that she need no longer fear the eye of mortality, that she could go about uncovered in the light of day, and that she would be as fair to look upon as the rest of her sex.

She lighted the gas and took up her mirror. For many long moments she sat there gazing at the perfect side of her face as a girl sometimes does upon a ring that her lover has given her. It was something precious in her sight.

It was not vanity. Far from it. You who had your untouched beauty during all the days of your life, can know nothing of the sensations that came to her. She looked upon her loveliness as a mother might upon the beauty of her child, and it pleased her in the same way.

Comforted by the great happiness that had come to her, in spite of the great sorrow, she went to bed.

For a long time she lay thinking—thinking of how strange a thing it would seem to her with that scar removed from her face—and then fell into a profound slumber.

It was impossible for her to judge in any way how long she had slept, but she was aroused at last with a sense of choking. It seemed to her that there was a great pressure upon her breast, a roaring in her ears, and wildly grotesque figures before her eyes.

She flung out her arms and sat up in bed. The atmosphere seemed dense, sultry. She could not understand it; and, more asleep than awake, she leaped out of bed and flung open the window.

The strange commotion in the street startled her anew. She looked down.

Below her it seemed that all the city had congregated. The people were yelling shrilly and gesticulating like crazy things, and as she looked a dull red glow, like the decline of the sun, startled her.

At that moment a voice from the street reached her—

"Don't jump! A fireman will have a ladder there for you in a minute!"

And then she realised it all—the house was on fire!

Her head swam. For one brief, terrified moment it seemed to her that she was going to faint, but it quickly dawned upon her that upon her ability to keep her senses depended her life. She saw that the house had been burning for some time, by the crowd that had collected below, and she understood all her danger by the cry that had come to her.

And then came the thought of Neil Stuart. What had become of him? Had they forgotten him? Had they left the man, still blind, to his fate?

She hesitated but a moment. She could not let them save her while she was still ignorant of what had happened to him; and after that brief hesitation, she turned from the window and groped her way toward the hall.

Again a cry from the street reached her half freezing the blood in her veins—

"Good heavens! she is lost!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

It seemed that, in that hour of terrible danger, every faculty of the brave woman was aroused as it had never been before.

Every precaution that she ever heard spoken of against suffocation from smoke came to her like a human voice crying them into her ear, and she staggered to the washstand, and quickly saturating a large bath towel with water, she wrapped it about her head and hurried from the room.

As she threw open the door leading into the hall, a dense volume of smoke came pouring in, and, protected as she was against it, she staggered back and for a moment it seemed impossible for her to go on. Then she summoned all her strength, and pushing her way, as if she were struggling against some overpowering force, she tottered through the hall and to the door of Neil's apartment.

She threw it open and sprang in.

The smoke followed her in great volumes and made her voice seem faint and far away when she called out as loudly as she could,—

"Neil! Are you there? For Heaven's sake, answer me!"

And the answer came so faintly that she scarcely heard,—

"Yes! I am here!"

With barely a pause for breath, she rushed to his side and seized his arm.

"Quick!" she called. "There is not a moment to be lost! The house is on fire!"

"I know it," he answered, his voice so curiously hoarse, that even under the excitement she noticed how unnatural it was. "I tried to find the door, but could not, then I tore the bandage from my eyes, and I think I fainted. I must have fallen, for I have hurt myself badly. I cannot walk, dear. You must not mind me. Save yourself."

He had said it all so quickly that it had barely taken a second, and yet already she could hear the crackling of flames so close to them that she turned around, half expecting to see the fierce red glow.

"Leave you here!" she gasped. "I can't! I can't! I had rather die with you than do that. Come! Oh, for Heaven's sake, try—try, and I will help you! Don't let us be burnt to death here like rats in a hole. Oh, for pity's sake, come!"

She put her slight arms about him and tried to lift him, but a hideous groan escaped him and she staggered back.

"Tell me what to do!" she cried, frantically. "There must be some way that we can save ourselves. Tell me what to do and I will do it!"

She bent over him, but no reply came from the stiff lips. From the sudden glare outside she was enabled to see his face. It was rigid as iron.

"Gracious Heaven!" she groaned. "He has fainted! Now what shall I do? Is there no hope? Oh, if I can but succeed!"

Suddenly it had occurred to her that she would hurt him less to attempt to drag him from the building when he was unconscious than any other time, and leaping toward the washstand, she saturated a towel for him as she had done for herself, and wound his head in it, then fastening her strong young arms round his shoulders, she dragged him from the room and into the hall.

She reached the stairs and looked down.

Already the red glow of the flames, bursting through the dense volumes of smoke, filled the lower hall; but she would not pause to see her awful danger. She commenced the descent, half carrying, half dragging Neil after her, and then suddenly she saw a man's form dart through the flame and smoke, and quicker almost than thought could travel, he was at her side.

"Good Heavens! Is it you?" he gasped. "What is the matter?"

She had already recognised Morgan's voice, and it seemed to her that it was the most natural thing in the world that he should be there. He had already lifted Neil in his arms when she answered,—

"He has fainted."

"Then you will have to look out for yourself. Pull that thing tight over your face and make a dash for it!"

She did as he had told her. A moment later and she felt the cool night air upon her scorched flesh and then she knew nothing further.

She heard afterward how she had fallen down,

but had been received into the willing arms of as many people as could crowd about her. Her night clothes were in flames, that licked high above her covered head; but the enthusiastic multitude quickly quenched them, and she was carefully wrapped in garments that someone provided, she never knew who.

When she recovered consciousness she was lying upon a cot, very white and very narrow, in a room that she had never seen before. She attempted to move, and soon discovered that, narrow as it was, it was sufficiently wide to accommodate all the movement that she was liable to make. She looked about her, and saw a young woman sitting at a little distance.

The stranger came forward as soon as she saw the blue eyes looking at her, and bent over the cot.

"What has happened?" stammered Olga.

"Did I dream it, or—"

The young woman smiled and passed her hand across the hot brow.

"There was not much dream about it," she answered, gently. "You have been pretty badly burned; but it is nothing serious, and if you are quiet you may be able to be out in a few days."

"Then there was really a fire?"

"I should say there was!"

In spite of the pain, Olga lifted herself to her elbow. Her breath came quickly, and a tremendous excitement burned in her eyes.

"It all comes back to me now, little by little!" she cried hoarsely. "For the love of Heaven, tell me what happened to him?"

The nurse's face changed. A cloud settled over it, and she would have turned away, but that Olga caught her by the arm and held her closely.

"Tell me!" she gasped. "Did I fall?" Is he—

She could not force herself to speak the word that was trembling in her heart; but the nurse understood.

"No, he is not dead," she answered. "The fire did not hurt him as much as it has hurt you."

"Then—what is it?"

"You must not excite yourself; the doctor would not like it."

"But you are only making it worse. If you would speak out, I could bear it; but I can't bear this suspense."

"He was hurt in a fall. He tells the doctor that it occurred before you came to him, when he first knew that the house was on fire."

"And—it will—kill him?"

"Ah! we can none of us tell that. He is very weak. He remembers nothing whatever of how he was rescued from the building; but his friend, Mr. Adeson, has told us of the noble part you played in it."

A curious sensation seemed to contract Olga's heart. She felt herself grow pale, and there was a long silence before she could force herself to speak again. When she did so her voice had altered strangely.

"And was—Mr. Adeson hurt in—any way?" she faltered.

"He was burned pretty badly. His eyebrows and lashes were burned off, and some of the hair was burned from his head, but the doctor says all that will grow again. His hands and arms were pretty badly burned, too, but he is going about."

The nurse smiled as she recalled the curious picture that he presented with his singed face and bandaged hands; but Olga sighed. She turned her face away for a little while, then asked, in a subdued tone:

"This is a hospital, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And is Mr. Stuart here?"

"Yes, he is here."

"May I see him?"

"Not at present, I am afraid. He cannot leave his bed, and the doctor would never hear of your doing so foolish a thing now. But there is some one else who wants to see you as soon as you are ready to be seen."

There was another pause; then, very faintly, Olga asked:

"Who?"

"Mr. Adeson."

"Oh!"

"Will you see him now?"

She hesitated. Even the nurse saw the wistful expression that crossed the girlish countenance. The lips grew white after a momentary struggle, and she answered, softly,—

"Certainly I will see him if he wishes it. Is he not my husband's friend?"

She seemed to be apologising for her own weakness in the last sentence, but the nurse only bowed.

"Will you see him at once?" she asked.

"Yes, at once, if he desires it."

(To be continued.)

VANESSA'S VENGEANCE.

—10:—

(Continued from page 105.)

Miss Poppel looked stonily at her for a moment and then glanced away at a photograph of herself reading a folio on which was inscribed in plain letters "Elegant deportment."

"Of course I need not say that I entirely disapprove of the whole plan," she said coldly. "But, if I remember you of old Cecil—though apparently pliable, you stuck to your own opinion in a manner that was hardly edifying. However, if you choose to accept the post in my household, now vacant of which the salary is £30 a year, you are at liberty to do so. The duties consist of looking over and repairing the wardrobes of the young ladies, and of generally making yourself useful. If you care to do a little teaching among the younger ones, such as hearing the little ones practice, I will increase your salary proportionately. I could not conscientiously take you, or recommend you, as teacher, for in spite of my earnest labours when with you, you knew next to nothing. You will not, I imagine, be able to earn a better salary anywhere for the same duties, and you will take your meals with us."

Cecil felt that the terms were generous, and that it would be wrong to refuse what would enable her to live. For her salary would bring up her yearly income to just one hundred pounds a year, and on that, even if Jem returned, she could manage to keep the wolf from the door.

"It is very kind of you, Miss Poppel, and I will gladly begin my duties at once," she said, rising.

"Very well, Miss Cecil, be here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and I will introduce you to your new work—good-morning."

And Cecil found herself outside the door of Poppel House with a feeling of intense relief.

Rufford was walking rapidly down one of the narrow crowded thoroughfares of which the interior economy of the city is full.

He was not thinking of the streets through which he was passing, nor of the countless people who passed him by, for his mind was full of Cecil and her troubles. He was bent upon finding Jem, but as yet all his efforts in that direction had been fruitless, for no trace could be discovered of the young clerk who seemed to have vanished as completely as though he had been spirited away by magic. At the corner of the street, a small shoeblack was standing with his paraphernalia.

He was rather a smarter looking boy than usual, and his brushes and stand were very carefully cleaned and polished.

Suddenly there was a cry, a rush of feet, and one of those speedily collected crowds which are one of the wonders of our great city.

Rufford stood for a moment, and saw that the little shoeblack had been knocked down by the wheel of a passing cab, and was sitting at the roadside trying to staunch the blood from an ugly gash in his forehead.

Some strange impulse of pity made Rufford lean over him; pushing his way through the crowd.

"Are you hurt badly, my boy?" he said.

"No thanks, governor, it's just a bit of a cut

that's all, and I must be off home to get it plastered."

He rose to his feet, but staggered backwards, and Rufford caught him by the arms.

"Here, get me a cab, one of you," he said to the bystanders; "I'll take the lad home, he is rather shaky."

When the four-wheeler was rumbling over the stones, making its way with difficulty to the close court where the shoeblack lived, Rufford began to realise his situation. Tom was so dazed by his accident that he sat huddled up in one corner of the cab hugging his brushes to his breast.

He had roused himself sufficiently to murmur out his address, and the fact that his name was Tom Blow, but had then collapsed into a haze of semiconsciousness.

It was a new experience to Rufford, and he hardly recognised himself in the strange rôle he was playing. The boy was too upset as yet to appreciate fully the incongruity of the whole affair—the smart garments of the London swell as compared with his own tattered clothes which neatly patched as they were, hardly held together. But to Rufford, this rattling cab with its dingy lining and its jaded steed—the ragged street urchin and the near proximity of a bottle of blacking, and a very unsavoury pair of brushes, was like the unreality of a dream.

"I shall wake up soon no doubt, and find out I've been asleep," he muttered to himself as the cab pulled up with a jerk at the end of a street which led to nowhere in particular, and in which all the houses looked mysterious.

Tom stumbled out after him, and Rufford half pushed half carried the boy up the winding broken staircase, the very atmosphere of which was redolent of onions and decayed apples.

At the very top of the house ran a long low ceiled attic, which Tom entered with an air of being completely at home, and collapsed into a broken Windsor chair.

"A cove's been and brought me home, mister," he gasped. "He's a kind sort of swell, and now you'll have to thank him for me and to bind me up a bit."

Out of the dim mystery of the corner of the attic a form seemed to grow into life. And as Rufford's eyes fell upon it, he started, for the gaunt face of the young man before him was an exact replica of the face he loved best in the world—of Cecil West.

He threw out his hand and caught the young fellow's arm. It was thin and tremulous, and as Rufford touched him he panted like a hunted animal, and made as though he would fly to the door.

"What do you want—what do you mean," he stammered.

"Jem West, I have been searching for you for weeks past. I am going to marry your sister, and she will not marry me till you are found."

He kept a tight grip on Jem's arm as he spoke, and restrained the terrified impulse of flight that long constraint had bred in the absconding clerk.

"I am not going to hurt you! Don't you see that I am your friend!" he went on hurriedly. "That £500 has been paid long ago, and no one wishes to prosecute you—you are as free as air now! You idiot, why did not you read the papers? They would have told you everything long ago."

For Jem West had fallen upon his knees in a convulsed paroxysm of tears and sobs which shook his attenuated frame like a storm of wind.

Tom was watching the scene with wide eyes of astonishment as he sat on his broken chair folding on to his injured head.

"Crikey," was all he muttered under his breath with a faint long drawn whistle. The romance of the whole affair was a little beyond him, but he had long ago guessed that the young man whom he had found half-starved, and had befriended many weeks ago, was something more than a mere street loafer out of employment. He crept a little nearer to Jem West, as he lay prone upon the floor, and laid one grimy hand upon his shoulder.

"Don't blubber, now, don't ee, now, there's a good chap; you know I allers was sure you was

a toff. But I shall miss you, for we've been rare and chummy."

"Don't cry, there—there, that'll do," said Rufford, a little impatiently; come along with me back to my rooms, West, and I'll look after you. As for poor Tom, get that nice-looking neighbour of yours we passed on the stairs to look after that head for you, and give her this from me. To-morrow I shall come and see how you are, and believe me, my boy, you will have no cause to regret your kindness to this gentleman."

He slipped two pieces of gold into Tom's hand, and then pushing Jem West to the door, went downstairs, and took the first hansom back to Piccadilly.

Tom, left alone, stared hard at the glittering gold in his dirty palm, and then slapped his hand upon his thigh.

"Crikey," he said, "here's a go!"

But at that instant, remembering that his head was throbbing and that the wound in his temple was stiff and sore, he bethought himself of his kind old neighbour, and went down to the room on the next floor to be bandaged and comforted.

"Lor, Tom, you've been and fallen on your feet *this time*," was Mrs. Dawes' remark, and although Tom did not acknowledge the fact aloud, he fingered his piece of gold very affectionately, and calculated the immense amount of new brushes the sum would buy!

CHAPTER IX.

THE DAWN OF JOY.

"Miss West, kindly go and superintend the practising in the fourth form class-room," said the shrill voice of the English mistress, as she half opened the door of the barely furnished dormitory where Cecil sat mending stockings by the dim light of a single gas-burner.

It was past three o'clock, and the December afternoon was already growing to its close.

Outside in the slushy streets the snow was falling in grimy flakes, which were never from their birth pure as country snow, and inside "Popple House" the tired mistresses were congratulating one another in that the Christmas holidays were close at hand, and talking of the fun they meant to have in their far distant homes.

Only Cecil had no home to talk about, no amusement in prospect, and nothing but a melancholy Christmas in front of her.

She raised her head a little disdainfully. The English mistress's voice was peremptory in its accents.

"I will go at once, Miss Jackson," she said, and then rose wearily from her chair and went downstairs to the class-room to superintend the weary round of tiresome little girls who found the scale of G major an insuperable difficulty.

Her head throbbled dully as she watched the thumping wooden fingers, and before her aching eyes would swim the recollection of a home by the sea-shore, redolent of flowers and peace.

She had had a miserable life since she had accepted the position of a sort of upper maid of all work at Popple House.

Her sad story had not crept out, and there was a certain reticence in her manner and a suspicion of disdain in her beauty which had aroused the jealousy of the mistresses, and the dislike of the elder girls.

She could not help it, for her whole mind revolted against the pettiness of this middle-class life, which never ascended higher than an aimless striving after position, or pounds, shillings, and pence.

She had no one to confide in, for to no one could she breathe the story of her miserable search for her brother, which seemed to be wearing her very life away.

Her gowns, too, were shabby, for every penny that she could spare from her food and lodging was diligently laid aside for Jem. And girls have no delicacy of feeling when a shabby gown is concerned, and did not spare her in their remarks and innuendos.

"Oh, Grace, Grace, when will you learn that

the F is a sharp, and that you must not put your thumb on a black note!" sighed Cecil, as the piano ceased for a instant after an appalling discord. "I cannot, oh, I cannot endure it," she went on, rising hurriedly to her feet, her nerves all on edge, worn down at last by the continual fret of her daily life.

Grace faintly giggled, and then pouted sullenly. She could not understand the tragedy of the life that had come among them, and, to her thinking, Miss Cecil was only very cross.

They were standing facing one another—the teacher and the pupil—with the fluttering leaves of music between them, when there came a rattle at the door handle, and Miss Jackson entered again, this time with a covert gleam of malice in her eye.

"Miss Popple wants you at once, Miss West," she said, and Cecil knew that her story was discovered, and that all the romance of it was merged in the one fact that she had been in prison.

Her hand dropped nerveless to her side, and she trembled. Was she going to lose her situation, and, with it, every chance of keeping the wolf from the door?

"What is the matter, Miss West? You look agitated!" went on the English governess.

"I wish we had known that we had the honour of entertaining so distinguished a personage in our midst. We might perhaps have —"

"Grace, go on with your practising," interrupted Cecil, sternly, recovering her self command, "I am going to Miss Popple at once."

The schoolmistress was standing by the window when the girl entered.

The parlour looked to Cecil's eyes more homelike than usual, with its warm flood of light and the daintily-spread tea-table, at which Miss Popple was about to regale herself.

But the face that greeted her was colder—more Gorgon-like—than usual, and the girl's heart sank.

"Did you want me?" she said, timidly.

"Yes; come in and shut the door behind you," was the stern answer.

"Cecil West, I took you out of sheer kindness, and on one condition, that your story never became known," went on Miss Popple, with a wave of her hand. "It has now become known, and you will have to leave me at once. I did wrong ever to take you with the prison taint upon your name, and the very fact of your having been so long an inmate of my house will probably bring discredit on my school. It seems hard that I should suffer for my generosity."

Cecil stood as if turned to stone, listening to the cruelly-selfish words, with a keen recollection of the drudgery she had undergone, and of the menial duties which had constantly been thrust upon her.

"I was proved to be perfectly innocent of the murder, Miss Popple," she said, quietly. "Even an angel from heaven might be accused of any crime. You are unjust to me."

"You are very far from being an angel, Cecil West, and many have been the complaints of your temper that I have listened to from inmates of my house. But, if you were so innocent, why did not Sir Reginald Rufford marry you, instead of leaving you here to earn your living! Yes; I know you have some plausible story about your unfortunate brother, but how am I to know that you are speaking the truth?"

Miss Popple had evidently been thoroughly irritated by some occurrence of that day, and, perhaps, did not pause to reflect on the gravity of her charges against the defenceless girl.

"You have only my word of honour to believe," said Cecil, now thoroughly roused; "and, after what you have said to me, I will not stay another instant in your house. No; I will not touch the money that is owing to me—let me go at once!" and with the air of an outraged empress, she swept from the room.

Her pride supported her until she had crossed the threshold of Popple House and had traversed half of the dreary way back to her lodgings.

Then, when she realised the whole affair in all its bitterness, one passionate sob welled up in her throat, nearly choking her, for she knew that without money her search for Jem must end,

and, if her boy was lost, how could she face her father beyond the river of death?

He had been wrapped up in his boy, and the knowledge of his guilt had killed him. If Jem were left alone now, he might sink to the lowest depths of degradation from whence he would never rise again.

A passionate prayer for help was on her lips as she stumbled wearily up the stairs to her little room.

She was so overwrought in body and mind, that she hardly noticed that the room was brilliantly lighted, and radiant with flowers, as she stood dazed and helpless on the threshold.

There were two figures in the room—two men—strangely familiar to her.

Was one—could one be Jem?

She turned up her arms with a smothered cry of joy, and fell upon her brother's breast, hiding her face upon his shoulder.

"Jem, my Jem! oh, thank Heaven, that I have you again!"

Rufford walked away to the window with a mist of something very like tears across his eyes.

He could not bear to interrupt the meeting of brother and sister. He felt that their joy was a sacred one, closely interwoven with grief.

Presently, as he stood there, he felt two warm arms steal round his neck from behind, and turning swiftly, he caught Cecil to his heart.

"How can I thank you enough?" she whispered. "Dear me, what a happy Christmas I shall have!"

"What about the cliff-path at Madden?" he answered, with a spice of mischief in his voice.

The gardens at Rufford Court were gleaming with brilliant flowers and musical with the splash of the fountains that tossed their waters into the June sunlight.

Two children were playing under the high stone terrace where a peacock was sunning himself among the stone urns full of geraniums and verbenas.

Not far off from them Cecil and her husband were walking arm-in-arm.

She was looking as lovely and as young as on the day when first we met her in the old Vicarage, and her eyes were as bright as the roses at her waist.

Her long white draperies swept round her on the green turf, and the only spot of colour that relieved her sunny attire was the scarlet fan she carried dangling from her waist, with its curiously-wrought gold sticks, and its Chinese inscription.

"Dear old Jem, how well he is getting on in his Chinese home," she said, thoughtfully, as she glanced down at it.

"How happy his last letter was, and how more than delightful it will be to see him again when he comes over next year."

"And what treasures we shall have to show him," said her husband, smiling, as he glanced at the children, two sturdy little boys of three and five years old, who were making the gardens ring with their happy voices.

"Cecil, my darling," he continued, "I know that we do not like to be reminded of that awful time that seems so long ago now."

Lady Rufford shuddered as she pressed nearer to her husband's side.

If she had ever been inclined to forget that time, the white tress of hair would have recalled it to her every time she glanced in her mirror.

"I saw an announcement in the paper this morning," he went on, gravely and tenderly, taking her hand in his; "and it was this: 'At the Convent of Our Lady of Sorrows, Vanessa Laacelles, aged 32.' She is dead, dearest, and out of the abundance of our happiness we can afford to pity her."

"She was a very unhappy woman," said Cecil, at last, "Heaven forgive her, even as I do, for the evil she wrought in our lives."

"Yes, I can say with as free a heart as you can, Heaven forgive her, for if she sinned much I have no doubt she suffered much," answered Sir Reginald. "And now, my wife, let us close this leaf of our lives for ever, and with Vanessa's death let us cease to remember 'VANESSA'S VENGEANCE.'"

[THE END.]

BY A WOMAN'S HAND.

—10:—

"How intolerably dull it is! Whoever told us that Florida was a winter paradise must have lived in a desert before coming here. Mamma, I'm going to shock the natives. I'm desperate. Where's Dan's gun?"

The yawn with which Effie Carlton began speaking ended in an energetic donning of out-of-door costume.

"Now, dear, don't. People will call you fast. It is no harm for you to know how to handle and shoot a gun, but you must not parade the accomplishment. I fancy Doctor Strafford would be horrified to see such a weapon in your hands."

Mrs. Carlton was a gentle, timid lady, and her anxious face at this moment caused her daughter to laugh merrily.

Effie Carlton's laugh was pleasant to hear. It told of such rich vitality and warm heartedness behind her rather haughty bearing that it came upon one as a surprise.

A gentleman, young and handsome, who was passing under the open hotel window at that moment, paused as the musical sound met his ear.

"That is Miss Carlton's laugh. And they told me she was riding. I wish I had not made an engagement with Miss Temple," he said to himself.

He glanced up toward the open window irresolutely. No one was visible. Twice he paced back and forth in front of the piazza, hoping for a glimpse of the bright face he was learning to think the most bewitching upon earth.

Ladies bowed smilingly, but he did not offer to join them.

Just as he had decided to wait no longer, a dainty figure in a dark dress glided from a side door of the hotel out of range from the piazza. It was Miss Carlton. She wore a gipsyish hat and plume which made her appear more lovely than ever before, Doctor Strafford thought with a quickening of his pulse.

He greeted her warmly.

She carried her brother's elegant little shot-gun in her hand, but the Doctor was too intent upon studying her mobile face to notice this.

She flushed radiantly under the light in his expressive eyes, and said, merrily,—

"I was hoping to avoid you. To tell the honest truth I'm just dying from ennui, and I'm out on a lark. I know you are shocked. But please recover and join me. I love to shoot a gun, and I can hit the mark every time. I'm a better shot than Dan. If you'll come with us I'll prove my words true. Dan is out in the grove."

The expression of Doctor Strafford's face changed from pleasure to shocked surprise.

"You are jesting Miss Strafford. Let me put the gun away. It looks so out of place in your hands."

But the young lady clung to it steadily.

"I'm speaking sober truth, Doctor Strafford. I don't care to parade the accomplishment, but at home I often go hunting with Dan. And I can hit a bird on the wing better than he. Mamma never fails to have her broiled bird for dinner when I go out."

A glance of keenest amusement flashed from her eyes as she saw his consternation.

"It is a—ah—an unusual accomplishment—for a young lady," he said, striving to hide his chagrin.

He had thought her all that was lovely and womanly, and here she was actually merry over killing an innocent bird.

"I see you are shocked. It is no use urging you to share my sport," she said, smothering a laugh.

"Thanks! but I have an engagement. I am already late."

And, with a formal bow, he turned away.

She sped swiftly towards the grove at the back of the hotel, where she knew her brother was reading.

That young gentleman greeted her warmly.

"Well, sis, this looks like home. Glad to see the gipsy in you is not quite dead. Shall it be a tree for a target or birds?"

The girl laughed, casting a glance over her shoulder towards the hotel.

"Let it be a tree this time. Some one might faint if I shot a bird. I wonder if Miss Temple would not join us if you asked her?"

Dan Carlton burst into a ringing laugh. He was much like his sister in strong vitality and genuine sunny-heartedness.

"She would never forgive me if I asked her. She would consider it an insult. I fancy I can see her haughty stare should I propose so unlady-like a thing!" he said bitterly.

Effie drew down the corners of her pretty mouth demurely.

"Then she just suits Doctor Strafford."

"How so?"

Her brother flashed her a keen glance. He liked the handsome, manly young physician, and was pleased to see that his wayward, high-spirited sister seemed more pleased with the Doctor's attentions than with any other of the train of admirers who always followed her.

She coloured faintly under Dan's close scrutiny, but gave no answer to his question.

In spite of her seeming gaiety, there was a pang at her heart. She and Doctor Strafford had become such good friends during their month together in this out-of-the-way little place that it did seem rather hard to recall his expression of disgust as he had left her, a few moments ago.

Miss Temple was openly angling for him, and now, no doubt, her endeavours to win him would be successful.

But Effie threw off this thought, and entered with her usual zest into the afternoon's sport.

Several gentlemen and one or two ladies joined them, and soon an eager party was scanning the bull's-eye, to see whose shot was best.

Miss Carlton, as usual, scored highest, much to Dan's delight. He took great pride in his sister's rare accomplishment.

A week later, Doctor Strafford was riding leisurely through a belt of luxuriant trees, a mile in the country. The trees skirted a rich hommock which had never been cleared and cultivated.

He had scarcely spoken to Miss Carlton since the gun episode. But he had seen her that very afternoon as he rode past the hotel. That was some three hours ago, but the remembrance of her sparkling face and the sunny smile with which she had greeted him, still filled his heart with warmth and joy.

"No matter though she is a trifle peculiar in her tastes, she is the sweetest and noblest girl I ever met," he said to himself, musingly. "Ha! see those splendid flowers. I'll get them and carry them to her. She loves all beautiful things."

He dismounted, but found the blossoms were so entangled in a network of brambles as to force him to make a wide circuit in order to reach them.

He threw his horse's bridle over the limb of a sapling and strode away.

When he reached the spot where the flowers grew, he found the ground damp and spongy.

"What beauties!" he cried, plucking a handful. "It is the dampness of the place that causes them to grow so luxuriantly."

He turned to retrace his steps when an ominous rattle smote his ears.

A huge snake was coiled just in front of him. He stepped hastily back and glanced about for a weapon with which to destroy the reptile.

To his horror, he found himself encircled by hissing, horrible serpents. There were at least a dozen, and each was prepared for deadly work. He had unwittingly entered a nest of these hideous reptiles.

He was some distance from the open road, having, as was his frequent habit, ridden across the forest to lessen his journey.

He had been told of persons in this land of rattlesnakes being thus encircled, and dying a horrible death ere aid could reach them, but he had always smiled at such a possibility.

With a growing sensation of horror, he looked around the circle of moving heads for an opening through which to escape. But there was absolutely none.

He was surrounded as perfectly as though an

intelligent enemy had laid in ambush for him. Had he possessed a weapon, he might have cut his way through, but a small pocket knife was his sole means of defence.

He made a step in the direction of his horse, and where the space between the enraged reptiles was larger than elsewhere.

But the hideous heads darted forward, and he was glad to spring back into his former position.

Cold drops of perspiration bedewed his face. He tried to think clearly of the best plan to escape, but his head was in a whirl.

A peculiar and sickening odour filled the air, and he knew it must be the poisonous exhalations from the serpents.

"I must make a run for liberty and stand the chance of being bitten," he muttered aloud, nervously himself for the desperate attempt.

Just then a low, clear voice said:

"Do not move: I can save you!"

A flash and a report, and the largest of the reptiles was no more. Another shot, and a second one was out of the way.

The young man leaped through the space thus opened and stood face to face with Effie Carlton.

Her cheeks were like white roses, but her eyes flashed fire.

She did not speak, but calmly and rapidly fired at another serpent.

With gentle force Doctor Strafford then took the gun from her hands, and led her towards his horse.

The animal was restive, but a word of its master quieted it.

A swift survey showed that no serpents were gathered here.

"Lightfoot is perfectly gentle. Let me place you in the saddle. Then I shall feel free to finish what you have so bravely begun," he said, a world of emotion in his voice.

She offered no remonstrance. Her strength seemed spent.

As he aided her into the saddle, her hand rested for an instant close to his face. Like a flash he bent his head and pressed a kiss upon the dainty fingers.

"This precious hand saved my life," was all he said.

A wave of rich crimson dyed her cheeks.

"Be careful," she whispered, as he turned away to face the horrid reptiles whose deadly rattle, ever and anon, sounded upon the air.

He shot four. The others disappeared in the thick underbrush which surrounded the place.

Doctor Strafford's adventure, and timely rescue by the beautiful and popular Miss Carlton, created a great sensation.

Many tourists visited the spot, and the seven dead serpents were secured and placed in the hands of a taxidermist.

No living ones were to be found. They had evidently retreated into the rich hommock.

The very next autumn Doctor Strafford and Miss Carlton were married.

"My being in the woods with a gun that afternoon, just in time to win a husband," she said, archly, the day after she was his wife, "was the merest chance. I was searching for Dan, who had promised to meet me in the grove. I had wandered farther than I supposed, attracted by flowers and the beauty of the day. I was just going to retrace my steps, when the neighing of your horse attracted my attention. I went closer, and was just in time to save you."

"And to open my stupid eyes to the fact that a girl can be all that is womanly and noble and lovely, and yet know how to wield a weapon," he added, tenderly.

A JAPANESE wedding would appear to be a melancholy affair. When the bride is told of the prospect she is expected to howl loudly and long. After she has been richly dressed for the event she must renew her shrieks until one of the attendants throws a veil over her face. Then an old hag takes her on her back and places her in a sedan chair. When she arrives at the bridegroom's house she is a wife, the simple ride in the flowery chair being the only ceremony required.

FACETIÆ.

CLARA (after her song): "Did my voice fill the room?" Prunella: "No, it emptied it."

THE latest method of eloping is by bicycle. In such instances it is love which makes the wheels go round.

"WHAT did Gamgee say when he heard that it was triplets?" "He said: This is two too much."

A YANKEE pedlar in his cart overtaking another, asked what he was carrying. "Drugs," was the reply. "Go ahead," said the former; "I carry tombstones."

"DOCTOR, to tow-headed urchin: "How is your mother, Tommy?" Tommy: "Oh, if you please, sir, she's getting very romantic in her right knee, she says."

SHE: "As I am to be a poor man's wife, don't you think I ought to get a cook-book?" He: "Wait a little, my pet, until we make sure that we will have anything to cook."

THE difference between the preacher, the builder, and the architect of a church is simply this: one is the rector, the other is the erector, and the third is the director.

CLAPHAM.—Witherby: "Didn't your new cook leave rather suddenly?" Plankington: "Yes; she made a slight mistake. She had a policeman and a burglar call on her the same evening."

MR. STAYLATE (as the weary hours wane): "Er—yes; a sunrise in this season is a most beautiful sight." Her father: "I'm glad you like it. It'll make your walk home much pleasanter."

DUDEBOY (falling on his knees): "Miss Croesus—Laura—I am all yours!" Miss Croesus: "Dear me, Mr. Dudeboy! Do you always make as much fuss as this over a small present?"

HE DIDN'T EXPECT HAPPINESS.—"I don't believe we can ever be happy together. I—" Fred: "Well, what's the use of bothering over trifles? What I want is to know if you will marry me!"

"DID you come across any brigands in Sicily?" "Plenty, but I always got the better of them."

"How?" "Why every time I met a suspicious-looking man on the road I went up to him and asked an alms."

MRS. HENRY PECK (looking up from her paper): "Ah, well, poor Mr. Hyson is rid of his trouble and misery at last." Mr. Henry Peck (in astonishment): "Why I did not know Mrs. Hyson was ill. When did she die?"

AN artist gave his latest painting to a porter to carry to an exhibition. "Be careful, be careful!" said he; "the picture is scarcely dry." "Oh, never mind!" exclaimed the porter. "It's of no consequence at all; my clothes are old."

A LONDON cabman was recently having his first born baby christened. Clergyman: "What name shall I give this child?" Cabby (through sheer force of habit): "Oh, I'll leave that to you, sir."

TEACHER: "Johnny, where is the North Pole?" Johnny: "I don't know." Teacher: "Don't know where the North Pole is?" Johnny: "When Franklin and Parry hunted for it and couldn't find it, how am I to know where it is?"

ILFRACOMBE.—YOUNG Man (who means to win her by his superior strength of mind): "You say you pity me, but cannot love me." "Yes." "But pity is akin to love?" "Yes; but only a poor relation." Young man gives his superior strong mind a rest.

"Do you see the horizon yonder, where the sky seems to meet the earth?" "Yes, uncle."

"Boy, I have journeyed so near there that I couldn't put a sixpence between my head and the sky!" "Why, uncle, what a crammer!" "It's a fact, my lad! I hadn't one to put?"

TOOTHOOING.—Steps of Plaster Villa; night. A manly voice: "Just one—just one." "Just one," said the mother putting her head out of the bedroom window above; "well, it isn't so late as that, but it's pretty near twelve, and you'd better be going, or her father will be down."

TEACHER (to class in arithmetic): "John goes marketing. He buys two and a quarter pounds of sugar at threepence a pound, two dozen eggs at a shilling a dozen, and one pint of milk at a shilling a gallon. What does it all make?" Smallest boy (hesitatingly): "Custards!"

A LADY told a party of friends that she had quarrelled with her husband, and had planted a tree in memory of this their first falling out. "What a splendid idea," whispered another lady, in her husband's ear; "if we had adopted that plan, we might have had by now a fine avenue of trees in our garden."

MOLLIE had been to church for the first time, and on her return home her grandmother asked her what she thought of it. "I liked it very much," she replied, "but there was one thing I didn't think was fair." "What was that, dear?" "Why, one man did all the work; and then another man came round and got all the money."

"REALLY, my dear," said poor Mr. Pecked to his better half, "you have sadly disappointed me. I once considered you a jewel of a woman, but you've turned out only a bit of matrimonial paste." "Then, my love," was the reply, "console yourself with the idea that paste is very adhesive, and will stick to you as long as you live."

AN Irishman was once asked by a friend to go to a concert with him. Pat consented to go. They had not proceeded far on the way before Pat asked how much the seats were. His friend said the front seats were one shilling each, and the back seats were sixpence each; the programmes one penny each. "All right," said Pat "I will sit in the programmes."

MISS GILLOT: There goes Professor Fox, the great scientist. I'd give a good deal to know what mighty problem he is thinking of now. Professor Fox (ruminating)—Let me see; I was to get three yards of tape, a pound of butter, order the coal, pay the butcher, and get some soothing syrup for the baby. I wish Mrs. Fox would attend to these matters herself.

MR. AND MRS. FITTS were out driving. "I wonder," said she, "just what the poor horse's feelings are. It must be just horrid to be driven and dragged around without any idea as to where one is going, except as some one directs." "I think I can appreciate his feelings," replied Mr. Fitts. "I imagine that he feels just about as I do when you take me out on a shopping trip."

THE following little story is told of a citizen whose education was somewhat superior to his wife's, a fact regarding which she was very sensitive. On one occasion the man drove over to inquire regarding the health of his sister-in-law, who was dangerously ill. Upon returning he was met by his wife, who asked of her sister's condition. "She is convalescent," replied the man. Immediately and in the most emphatic manner the woman cried out: "I want none of your soothing words, I want facts. You tell me this minute, is my sister dead or alive?"

'ARRY and 'Arriett, with their infant daughter and a party of jovial "relations" and "pals," had been waiting some time for the overdue performance of the christening. The angry parents had just sent word to the curate, through the verger, begging him to wait a little longer for the arrival of 'Arriett's brother Bob, the one elect godfather, when the verger recognised Bob by the description given, and beckoned him to hasten. "Hurry up," said the man in the cassock, "you are keeping us all waiting." Bob, who had been more than once that morning misdirected in his journey to the church, was now hot and savage, and ready to let fly at the first man who snubbed him, or even approached snubbing. "I was sent by some fool—" he was just saying, when the verger cut him short with "Never mind that, hurry in, you're a sponsor." This was too much for the martyred Bob, who promptly and loudly called out, "And you're another, you black flunkey." Complications were only avoided by a prompt and humbled explanation of the meaning of "sponsor."

SOCIETY.

THE Queen is very much in favour of having the barbarous custom of hunting tame deer stopped; or, in other words, of abolishing the Buckhounds altogether.

THE birth of an heir has given the greatest pleasure in Roumania, where the handsome young Crown Prince and Princess are immensely popular. Duke Alfred and the Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha are very delighted at the advent of their first grandchild.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales, and the Princesses Victoria and Maud will settle at Sandringham for the winter. The Princesses' prolonged stay in Denmark was owing to the Princess of Wales's reluctance to leave her mother, whose years are seventy-six, and who, in spite of her good looks and fine constitution, is not so strong as she was last year.

WINDSOR CASTLE is undergoing a good deal of repairing and overhauling again this autumn, in readiness for Her Majesty's sojourn there. Parts of the inside of the Victoria Tower are being redecorated, and a good many alterations are in progress in other portions of the Castle.

THE ex-Empress is a great believer in the occult sciences, such as palmistry, chiromnomy, astrology, and divination generally. This trait she shared with her husband, who, like most adventurers of fortune, including the first Napoleon, Wallenstein, and others, believed largely in omens, stars, lucky hours, &c.

MILLE ARMEE RAFIN, the armless artist, who drew with her feet the pastel of the Duchess of York exhibited at the Imperial Institute, is a young Genevoise of rare intelligence. The eldest daughter of a Swiss barrister, she, as a child, drew with her feet better than most people draw with their hands, and at the age of fifteen she began her artistic studies in one of the best studios in Switzerland.

It is intimated that the Queen intends to make some alteration in the method in which charity is bestowed upon the poor round Balmoral. In future a fixed sum is to be divided among those who are known to be deserving of Her Majesty's kindness. The poor will consequently benefit by the generosity of the Queen, even when she is not in residence at Balmoral.

LIFE at Sandringham ought to be very gay this winter in all the circumstances. Prince George and his bride will bring a new interest into the family circle of our future king, and there promises, one way and another, to be a big gathering of young folks in the vicinity as soon as November sets in.

A LIFT has just been placed in the private apartments at Windsor Castle for Her Majesty's use, and another lift will be fitted at Osborne before the end of next month. The Queen has a greater number of steps to ascend at Osborne than at any other of the Palaces, as her own apartments are in the pavilion near the top of the house. Lifts are also being made for Buckingham Palace and for Balmoral, which will be ready for use early in the spring. There was a lift at Buckingham Palace for some years which was made for the Duke of Albany, although after his death it was removed.

No traveller is more popular in Denmark than the Czar, although his luggage consists of no fewer than three hundred large trunks (exactly twice the number of those used by the Princess of Wales and her daughters), which fill fourteen railway-vans. One of these cases is entirely devoted to the Imperial presents, which are distributed with extraordinary liberality. A largesse of ten thousand francs is distributed among the Fredensborg servants; Danish functionaries of all grades are made happy by the various crosses and ribbons of Stanislas and St. Anne; diamond rings reward the assiduity of the police, while gold watches and chains of considerable value are bestowed on telegraphists and station-masters. The Emperor always causes a large sum of money to be given to the poor of Fredensborg.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 1,100,000 widows in this country, while there are only half that number of widowers.

THERE are 6,000,000 leaves upon an elm-tree thirty feet high.

A RECENT census of the Geographical and Statistical Institute of Spain establishes the fact that out of the seventeen million inhabitants of that country, over eleven millions are ignorant of the art of reading and writing.

THE new census of foreigners in Paris is about completed, and it appears that there are thirty-five hundred and ninety nine permanent American residents. This is a falling off of more than twelve hundred within two years.

A LATE government return shows that there are 80,000 stuttering children in the schools of Germany. The habit is said to be increasing, owing to the children mimicking one another. The school authorities are now taking steps to lessen the number of children thus afflicted.

GEMS.

CONDUCT is the great profession. What a man does tells us what he is.

HE who despises mankind will never get the best out of others or himself.

YOU cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one.

OUT of suffering comes the serious mind; out of salvation the grateful heart; out of endurance fortitude; out of deliverance faith.

THERE are some faults slight in the sight of love, some errors slight in the estimate of wisdom; but truth forgives no insult and endures no stain.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRENCH TOAST.—Add to two well-beaten eggs half a cup of sweet milk; then dip slices of bread in the mixture and brown on a griddle, to which a piece of butter the size of a walnut has been previously added. When browned on the under side, turn the bread over. To be eaten with syrup.

DEVILLED BISCUITS.—Water biscuits are very delicate deviled for supper, a late supper, which one sometimes needs just before retiring. Split the crackers, and butter both halves generously; sprinkle over a rich layer of grated cheese, set in a chafing dish, dust over some cayenne, and cover, placing the dish over the spirit lamp until the cheese melts. It is to be eaten very hot.

To tell an old rabbit from a young one, and vice versa, press the knee-joint of the fore-leg with the thumb. When the heads of the two bones which form the joints are so close together that little or no space can be perceived between them, the rabbit is an old one; if on the contrary, there is a perceptible separation between the two bones, the rabbit is young, and more or less so as the two bones are more or less separated.

SODA SCONES.—One pound flour, one teaspoonful carbonate of soda, half teaspoonful of tartaric acid, half teaspoonful salt, some buttermilk—rub all the lumps out of the powders and salt, and mix thoroughly with the flour. Stir in as much milk with a spoon as just gathers up the flour. It should be rather soft. Take plenty of flour on the table. Divide the dough into two, and knead each a little, and roll into a round only a quarter of an inch thick. Put plenty of flour on the top. Cut in four scones, and put on a warm but not too hot griddle. Let them cook till they feel firm, but they must not be brown outside, only yellow—turn them.

MISCELLANEOUS.

In Finland and East Turkestan thunderstorms are wholly unknown.

ONE of the lost arts is the manufacture of malleable glass.

In some cantons of Switzerland there are held annual wrestling matches once a year, at which pretty nearly everyone is present.

A TELEPHONE which will talk loud enough for a person in any part of a large room to hear and understand has been recently devised.

THERE is a prospect of a ball being given at Sandringham when the Prince and Princess of Wales and their family return to their Norfolk home, probably early in the new year.

THE German Empress is not only a woman of rigid punctuality in the performance of every duty that falls to her, but she insists upon punctuality in everybody else. When she gives a wedding-present, or sends a birthday gift, she is sure to select a clock as an offering.

ANY good steel that will harden will answer for permanent magnets. The steel should be hardened and the temper drawn to a purple. The depth of the wire surrounding the arms of the magnet should not exceed the diameter of the arms.

AMONG solids, glass is apparently perfectly elastic. A plate of glass bent under pressure and allowed to remain under stress for twenty-five years, when released and carefully tested for any permanent set, was found to have returned to exactly its original shape.

ELECTRIC LAUNCHES may supersede gondolas on the canals of Venice, as one result of the Columbian Exposition. One of the Chicago launches has already been sent to Venice by a company which has an option on thirty of the fifty launches now in use at the fair.

TRAVELLERS in the arctic regions say the physical effects of cold there are about as follows: Fifteen degrees above, unpleasantly warm; zero, mild; ten degrees below, bracing; twenty degrees below, sharp, but not severely cold; thirty degrees below, very cold; forty degrees below, intensely cold; fifty degrees below, a struggle for life.

ON the ninth day of the first month every Egyptian was obliged to eat a fried fish before the door of his house, except the priest, who burned instead of eating the fish. The revenues arising from the fisheries of Lake Moeris were given to the Queen of Egypt for pin money, and are stated to have amounted to something like 400,000 dollars annually.

ON the stairway landing of almost every Parisian chateau there are small tables designed to hold candles. When the guests are saying good-night, this table presents a pretty picture. The candles are of varied colours, the candlesticks of odd designs, and the lights are pleasantly softened by coloured shades. A green candle in a silver candlestick, with a perfectly formed pond lily for the shade is but one of many novelties.

In manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries we had pictures of cradles formed of part of a tree trunk dug out, with holes bored through the sides for the passage of straps intended to tie the baby down in his bed. These dug-out cradles are still common in modern Greece. When we come to consult the manuscripts and bas-reliefs of the fifteenth century, we notice that the cradles are no longer mere baskets or beds on rockers, but little swinging beds suspended between two pillars, the prototype of the modern berceuse.

THERE is no doubt that the custom of taking wine or spirits or beer between meals and on an empty stomach—in one word the pernicious habit of "nipping"—is highly injurious. The morning nip, between breakfast and the midday meal, which is so frequently taken by domestic servants, nurses, workpeople, and "City men," renders the taker less fit for his daily work than he would otherwise be, and it is often in women the first fatal step towards dram-drinking, and the shameful life of the woman-drunkard, of which we are hearing so much at the present time.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

PELHAM.—Your handwriting is good.

DAISY.—Ask your chemist for a solution.

CORIO.—Take it to a dealer in old books.

R. O. H.—A premium is generally required.

A READER.—January 1, 1893, fell on Thursday.

PUZZLED.—There is really no law on the subject.

DON JUAN.—She would be very rude if she did not.

L. COOPER.—He cannot be rearrested on same charge.

BELEIDA.—It is against our rule to answer letters by post.

DISTRESSED.—Try glycerine, and apply every night before retiring.

TED'S LITTLE WIFE.—You can get them from any oilman or grocer.

INQUISITIVE.—Boston is two hundred and sixty-three years old.

DOUBTFUL.—Ask at the shop where you bought the lamp.

HUBERT.—We do not think it is valuable, though doubtless a curiosity.

CHARLIE BOY.—Of course it is illegal to trespass in pursuit of game.

JOLLY JACK.—Midshipmen in the Royal Navy are paid 1s. 9d. per day.

M. N.—A man takes his nationality from his father, no matter where he is born.

AN ADMIRING READER.—As you are of age you cannot be prevented from going to America.

CONSTANT READER.—The first tunnel in England was made near Manchester in 1769.

NEIL STUART.—Write to the Secretary, Inland Revenue Somerset House, London, W.C.

B. B. B.—The children will be of the same nationality as their parents.

PHYLLIS.—Great patience would be necessary on part both of pupil and teacher, but you are not too old.

SHY LITTLE POLLY.—The presumption is that the gentleman greatly admires you.

PRUDENCE.—A marriage with a deceased wife's sister is still illegal in England.

RAYMOND.—Have nothing more to do with a lender who begins by asking a fee.

HARRISON.—There are many works of the sort; we cannot say which would suit you best.

ANXIOUS.—It would be better to ask some of the family.

L. S.—A voter cannot, under any circumstances, give more than one vote for a parliamentary candidate.

JUNIA.—The tone of a piano improves when the instrument is removed from the wall of a room.

ALEXIS A.—Write to steamship company and ask where the ship you mention will land her passengers.

SERENA.—We really could not undertake to name a book that gives all you seem to require.

AN OLD READER.—We really cannot tell you where you could get second-hand harps.

DONKEY.—You had better write to Somerset House, Strand, London, giving all the facts asking for information.

PERFLEXED ONE.—The citizen of full age is liable to a penalty, if he refuses when called upon to assist a constable.

S. S. E.—There is no law to compel a father to support his daughter, unless she become chargeable to the parish.

A TEN YEARS' READER.—Taken with common sense and discrimination it is a most valuable and safe remedy.

SYBIL.—The most flesh forming food is sugar. Thin people can't use too much of it; fat people can't use too little of it.

POOR MARTYR.—We have never yet come across such an extraordinary case, so can only advise you to consult a doctor personally.

R. A. B.—Steam will not set wood on fire; the moisture in it prevents that; but a pipe through which the steam passes may do so.

ROSETA.—Leather which is dull and stained can often be restored by a mixture of oil and vinegar, well mixed.

TROUBLED ONE.—We think you had best abandon physic and take to a daily morning bath with rough-rub, and plain, easily digested, vigorous food.

LULU.—A new, soft paint brush is a good thing to dust carved furniture with, as the bristles will penetrate the deepest crevices.

POOR MER.—Some cases of colour-blindness can be cured—that is, the eye can be so educated as to distinguish and discriminate.

DISTRACTED BRIDE.—We should think that the marriage would be binding, though both parties would be punishable for making the false declarations.

DACRE.—Your handwriting would seem to indicate business ability, but beyond that we do not notice it in any particular characteristic.

QUERIST.—The town of Gibraltar is far from inviting in any respect, being decidedly overcrowded and mean-looking; it is also under very strict military rule.

L. D.—Your best course would be to apply in writing to the secretary, who will then forward a printed paper stating all the conditions that must be observed.

PEARL.—Names are pronounced differently in different localities. Certain names are used in certain families and the same pronunciation is retained for generations.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Mildew is a fungus, and possibly if you added say one or two drops of carbolic acid to your oil you would destroy the germs of the growth.

ONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.—Lay a piece of woollen cloth wrung out of water upon the article to be pressed, then pass a hot iron quickly and heavily over it.

B. B. C.—Write to Secretary, Civil Service Commission, Cannon Row, Westminster, S.W., who will send you particulars of examination also date of next sitting.

LYDIA.—The better plan is to cover your draft screen with black linen cloth and paste your scraps on that; but any "fancy stationer," will give you black paper if you prefer it.

THE CHILDREN WE KEEP.

The children kept coming one by one,
Till the boys were five and the girls were three,
And the big brown house was alive with fun,
From the basement floor to the old roof tree.
Like garden flowers the little ones grew,
Nurtured and trained with tenderest care;
Warmed by love's sunshine, bathed in dew,
They blossomed into beauty rare.

But one of the boys grew weary one day,
And leaning his head on his mother's breast,
He said, "I am tired and cannot play;
Let me sit awhile on your knee and rest."
She cradled him close to her fond embrace,
She hushed him to sleep with her sweetest song,
And rapturous love still lightened his face
When his spirit had joined the heavenly throng.

Then the eldest girl, with her thoughtful eyes,
Who stood where the "brook and the river meet,"
Stole softly away into Paradise.
Ere "the river" had reached her slender feet,
While the father's eyes on the graves were bent,
The mother looked upward beyond the skies;
"Our treasures," she whispered, "were only lent;
Our darlings were angels in earth's disguise."

The years flew by, and the children began
With longings to think of the world outside;
And as each in turn became a man,
The boys proudly went from the father's side.
The girls were women so gentle and fair,
That lovers were speedy to woo and to win;
And with orange blooms in their braided hair,
Their old home they left new homes to begin.

So one by one, the children have gone—
The boys were five and the girls were three;
And the big brown house is gloomy and lone,
With but two old folks for its company.
They talk to each other about the past,
As they sit together at eventide,
And say: "All the children we keep at last
Are the boy and girl who in childhood died."

E. V. W.

LITTLE BLOSSOM.—Really we cannot see what you have to complain of. Surely it is much more pleasant and comfortable, both to yourself and to others, to have cold hands rather than hot and sticky ones.

FAIR LILY.—It takes a leaf just three weeks to unfold itself from the time it first appears in the leaf bud. Maple leaves are more rapid than the others and are perfect in two weeks.

UNHAPPY ONE.—We are unable to understand your condition if you have not contracted some skin disease that will not yield to treatment such as you are applying or have brought on the ailment by some course of procedure not disclosed.

H. G.—In the Crimea our men were brigaded with Frenchmen, Serbians, and Turks against the Russians; but these were our allies, not our mercenaries. We have not at any time during this century hired other countries' soldiers to fight our battles.

LIVIA.—For sorters in the Post Office the examination is very easy—merely reading, writing, and the first four rules of arithmetic. There is little prospect of advance, unless they qualify themselves to pass stiffer examinations.

VINCENT.—We know nothing of the finances of the company in question, nor do we ever give an opinion on such matters. By writing to the secretary you will get a prospectus.

A. G.—Queen Victoria has now passed the record of Henry III., who ruled fifty-six years and twenty-nine days, and has reigned longer than any English Sovereign save George III., who ruled from October 25th, 1760, to January 29th, 1820, a period of fifty-nine years and ninety-seven days.

DAVID.—You can detain your son-in-law's goods if you wish to, or you could summons him through the County Court for the amount owing.

A WOULD-BE EMIGRANT.—Write to the Secretary, Emigrants' Information Office, Westminster, who will furnish you with full particulars.

MARIETTA.—Do not attempt anything like a long speech or any unusual or high-flown terms. Society has a fair amount of "small change" in the way of set phrases and current responses, and it is much better to use these than to try innovations of any sort.

W. F.—If perfectly pure colours are used, and proper care is taken in the mixing, the paintings need no coating to protect the colours. They will dry and become fixed, and nothing in reason will disturb them. It is doubtful if anything will fix poor or adulterated colours; therefore, varnish or other coating will be of little use.

BIRD LOVER.—For parrots, canary seed should be the staple food; they will also take hemp, oats, barley, Indian corn, sunflower seed; give hemp sparingly. It is binding; sunflower is much safer; Indian corn should be given boiled instead of raw occasionally; oats are much relished by the bird; give groundsel, chickweed, or lettuce freely, but always dry.

LORETTA.—An old tradition says that all roses were white in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. As Mother Eve strolled in among the flowers, she kissed a white rose, and it blushed itself pink. When Eve was driven from the Garden of Eden, the rose covered itself with prickles so that no profane hand might pluck its sweets.

NANNETTE.—Half an ounce cayenne pepper, half an ounce shallots, and half an ounce garlic. Pound all up well, pour over them one quart of boiling vinegar, cover loosely, and let it cool; and before bottling, add a quarter of a pint of Indian soy. Stir up all well together, and bottle; cork close, and keep in a cool, dry place.

NESSIE.—The fact that you meet these young men every day and become familiar with their faces is no excuse whatever. When you cannot make acquaintances in a regular and ladylike way, it is better not to make them at all. Keep to yourself and preserve your dignity and good reputation. It will be far better for you in the long run than the other course.

OSBERTA.—The handiest scrap-books are made by cutting pieces of white or brown paper into big squares, all of the same size, and tying all together with a ribbon at the top. Such a scrap-book can be opened wide at any place in the book, and it is easy to look over the leaves, because the book can be turned inside out or over back or sideways.

DOLLY.—To make apple marmalade take 4 lbs. sugar, 4 lbs. apples, 3 tea cups of water, 1 teaspoonful ground cinnamon; pare, core, and slice the apples, and put them in a pan with the water; stew till they are perfectly soft and quite a pulp, then add the sugar and cinnamon and boil for half an hour, stirring very often to prevent burning; put in jars and cover for use.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Either it is constitutional—that is, hereditary from parents—or it is induced by habit, such as wearing a close cap, working in a bad atmosphere, sitting immediately under a gas-light or lamp, or letting the system down by inattention to digestive arrangements; of all things the morning bath and rough rub—especially a shower bath—is best in such a case; of local applications, pure paraffin oil, sweetened with a perfume, is highly recommended.

HELEN.—Our advice in all cases where the hair is beginning to fall out is to try to ascertain the cause; it may be wearing a close cap too constantly, working or sleeping in close ill-ventilated apartments, or sitting immediately under a gas-light or lamp at work; or the general state of the health may be low, and in that case what is needed is a tonic remedy; nothing does more good in all cases of thinning of scalp than a daily shower bath, and firm rubbing of "pow" with rough towel.

LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY.—They should be scrubbed with a soft, firm brush, and soap and water. If badly stained, put them into a large saucpan in lukewarm water, in which soda and soap powder have previously been dissolved. Set them near, but not on, the fire for several hours; then place the saucpan with its contents in a cool place, and do not attempt to take out the globe until the water is quite cold. Rinse in lukewarm water and dry thoroughly with a soft cloth. After this process be careful always to put the globe in the sunshine or in a warm place to dry absolutely before it is used. Otherwise it will crack.

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